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No. 27

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY REVIEW



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## CONTENTS

Impulse: Editorial by Doug Fratz .....	4
Pitching Pennies at the Starboard Bulkhead: "Saluting Pamela Sargent" by Michael Bishop .....	5
Interview With Greg Bear by Pascal J. Thomas .....	8
The Allen Critic by Richard E. Geis .....	11
Make It Scream by John Shirley .....	13
According to Hoyle by Gregory Benford .....	15
Immortalism: The Long Range View - Part 4 by Marvin Kaye .....	17
Reviews: Books Etc. by Doug Fratz; Eugene Lin; Dean R. Lambe; Mark J. McGarry; Andrew M. Andrews; Ron Hamblen; David F. Hamilton and Howard Coleman .....	18
Nonfiction SF Books of Note in 1986 by Doug Fratz .....	21
Audio SF&F Reviews by David F. Hamilton .....	23
Counter-Thrusts: Letters by Alexis Gilliland; Janrae Frank; Darrell Schweitzer; Andrew Weiner; Millea Kenin; J. B. Neumann and David Pettus .....	28

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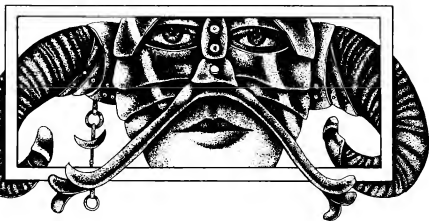
## ARTWORK

Allen Koszowski.....Cover	
Mike Romburg.....4	
John D. Waltrip.....5	
Dave Garcia.....11	
Alfred Klosterman.....13	
Gale Steelman.....15	
Jim Garrison.....17	
Jan Sherrill Gephardt.....18	
William Rotsler.....28	
Alexis Gilliland.....29	

## ADVERTISING

Baen Books.....2	
Underwood/Miller.....19	
Controversy in Review.....20	
AC Projects, Inc.....22	
Franklin Watts.....24, 25	
Thrust Publications.....27	
Unclassified Advertisements.....30	
DAW Books.....31	
Tor Books.....32	

# IMPULSE



## editorial by Doug Fratz

Welcome to **THRUST** 27, coming hot on the heels of **THRUST** 26, which may be catching some of you by surprise, despite my calm assurances that **THRUST** is now quarterly. This has certainly been a bit traumatic for me—I'd barely gotten last issue out the door when I found that I was already behind schedule for this issue...

I am assuming here, of course, that this issue is reaching you on schedule, unlike last issue, when our printer took over four weeks to deliver a job projected to take 10 days, resulting in **THRUST** 26 going out 3 weeks late. I have received assurances that this won't happen again.

Our letters-of-comment writers must have also gotten used to a more leisurely publishing schedule—I received only a handful of letters by the LOC deadline. I have, however, received several comments that **THRUST** 26 may have been our best issue to date. That may be true, but I have every intention of setting new standards on a regular basis.

As important as it is, however, to let me know how good you think **THRUST** is—goodness knows I need plenty of psychological lifts if I'm going to keep working on this insane schedule—it is even more important that you tell others how good **THRUST** is, preferably people who have not yet discovered us. A very large subscription base must be built and maintained to keep a quarterly literary review magazine on firm financial footing. So tell your friends about **THRUST**. Buy them gift subscriptions. Take **THRUST** to local SF meetings. Ask your local SF bookstore to carry **THRUST**, if they don't already.

I've been publishing **THRUST** for over 15 years now, and fully intend to continue for another 15 years. But we need the assistance and support of our most loyal readers to make sure that we can continue to deliver on schedule.

**The Issue At Hand:** Michael Bishop once again leads off the issue, this time with a look at under-appreciated SF author and editor Pamela Sargent. With two major novels appearing in 1986, *The Shore of Women* and

*Venus of Dreams*, the latter being the first novel of a trilogy, as well as a short story collection this year (for which Bishop's piece was written as an introduction), Pamela Sargent may be on her way to receiving some of the critical attention she has always deserved, even during her less prolific years.

Our interview this issue is with Greg Bear, an author whose work has rapidly matured in recent years to attain award-winning vision and intensity, as demonstrated in *Eon*, a major hard SF novel, and shorter works such as "Hardfought" and "Blood Music." Bear has clearly become a major 1980s SF writer.

It is with great pride that I introduce **THRUST**'s newest columnist and contributing editor, Richard E. Geis, whose first column appears this issue. Dick Geis needs no introduction to those of you who were regular readers of *SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW*. Many of you may be asking yourselves how I went about coaxing Geis out of his semi-retirement to write on SF again. Savvy editor that I am, I approached him through his weakest link: Alter Ego. Alter was able to bring Geis on board, and according to Alter, it went something like this...

"Geis, wake up! I got us a job!"

"Huh? You what?"

"I got us a job writing about some of your favorite topics in science fiction. And in **THRUST**—*Science Fiction and Fantasy Review*, no less!"

"No way. You got this job, Alter, you do the work! I'm retired. I did *SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW* and *THE ALIEN CRITIC* for over 16 years, and *PSYCHOTIC* for 20 years before that! I've won 13 Hugo Awards and five other 'Best Fan Writer' awards in my long life, and I'm tired. Leave me alone."

"But Geis, Doug Fratz specifically asked for both of us!"

"He did?"

"Well, actually, just you...but he really meant both of us. We're a team, after all. Anyway, Fratz is going to pay us real money just to write a column in **THRUST**, and we can say anything we want, as long as it pertains to SF and fantasy, of course."

"Anything? For real money? Well, maybe...but what would we call such a column? Hmmm...how about 'Deep Thrusts'?"

"That was my first choice too, but Fratz nixed it. (He hasn't our highly evolved sense of humor, obviously.) He wants it called 'The Alien Critic.'"

"Well, I suppose it was my best title..."

"Anyway, get your brain in gear—what little you have left—and help me with our first column! It's due tomorrow and we haven't even started yet!"

"Geez, Alter, this seems like a lot of trouble—and Fratz and **THRUST** was my competitor for all those years..."

"Look at it this way, Geis. All we have to do is think our usual brilliant thoughts (at least mine are always brilliant) and get them through your clumsy fingers onto paper. We send them to Fratz, and he and his staff have to get them keyboarded, typeset, proofread, illustrated, laid out, printed, and distributed to all our readers! They wear themselves out promoting and selling our masterpieces! They do all the donkey work! We set back and reap the rewards: real money, prestige, groupies..."

"But Alter, I like mindless, donkey work—it helps me forget my problems—like having you around, for instance."

"Geis, just knock off the bellyaching. Let's get to work. A new career awaits us! 'The Alien Critic by Alter Ego and Richard E. Geis.' It has a very nice ring to it."

"Groupies, you said groupies? Well, okay."

Fortunately for us, Alter can be very persuasive, as well as insightful and enterprising.

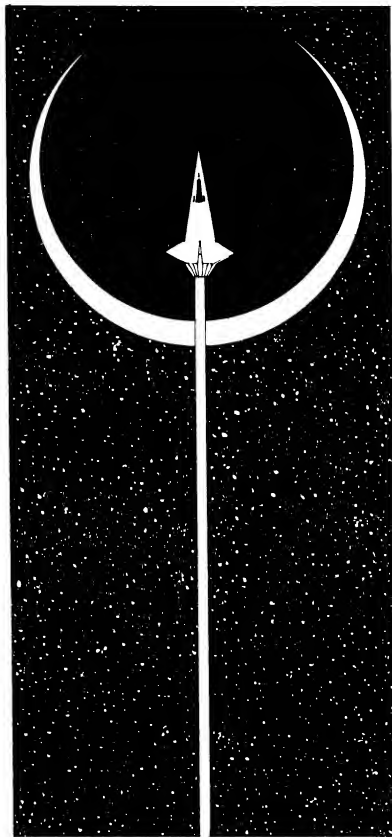
John Shirley is back again this issue with a new topic: science fiction conventions. I hope that **THRUST**'s readers will respond avidly to John's Alternative Convention Programming Contest. The prizes are real, and well worth the effort to try to win. Enter early and often.

(Speaking of contests, there is still time to respond to last issue's request by Charles Sheffield for ratings of the scientific ideas and literary quality of the SF by each of 252 authors. Please feel free to respond even if not intimately familiar with the work of all 252!)

Our guest writer this issue is Gregory Benford, with a short article on the contribution of respected British scientist Fred Hoyle to the development of hard science fiction. As a fan of both Benford's SF and his SF commentary, I hope to be able to convince him to contribute regularly to **THRUST**.

And, finally, the 4th article in Marvin Kaye's thought-provoking series on immortality appears this issue, after being squeezed out last issue. Kaye now tells me that there may end up being 7 articles in the series, instead of 6...[is this series to be immortal?]

**Coming Attractions:** Scheduled for **THRUST** 28 (due out in September) are an interview with Hal Clement, Marvin Kaye with part 5 of his series on immortality, Lawrence Watt-Evans with his views on cyberpunk, an interview with Walter Tevis conducted in 1982 only months before his death in 1983 (which was squeezed out of this issue at the last minute), and lots of our usual columnists, possibly including the long-absent George Alec Effinger. □



Pitching Pennies  
Against The  
Starboard  
Bulkhead

MICHAEL  
BISHOP

Saluting Pamela Sargent

Singers sing, dancers dance, actors act, and tuba- players...well, they tuba. These truisms surprise almost no one. However, if you add to this unremarkable list the parallel observation that "writers write," some people demur. Writers (they ignorantly beg to differ) take business lunches with editors, pontificate on talk shows, hold signing sessions in the book departments of glamorous retail emporia, collect royalty checks, negotiate with Spielberg or Coppola for movie rights, vacation in the south of France, win the Nobel Prize for literature, and--fulfilled, honored, wealthy--shuffle off this mortal coil at age ninety-three only to pass into the Undying Collective Memory of Posterity.

Writing (such people self-delusively declare) has nothing, or almost nothing, to do with it.

And, of course, when we confront the writer-celebrities whose stock-in-trade is self-promotion and high-profile public strutting, these people (the ones who want to

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[This essay was written as the forward to Pamela Sargent's collection, *The Best of Pamela Sargent*, published in the spring of this year by Academy Chicago Publishers (425 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611); \$15.95 (hardcover); \$5.95 (trade paperback).]

be writers, too, but who don't care to put their families to a chair bottom and their fingers atop a keyboard or brood a pencil to earn that title) may appear to be on to something.

Obviously, however, the key word here is *appear*. The celebrity writers who may first come to mind—Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal, and Garrison Keillor from the literary mainstream; Isaac Asimov, Harlan Ellison, and Stephen King from the sf and horror fields—have all gained access to media attention, for good or for ill, by virtue of a firm commitment to the written word. More simply put, it was their writing, not their engaging and/or infuriating public personalities, that first opened the doors for them to reveal their talents for telegraphic soliloquy and showmanship.

"For Pete's sake," I can hear the reader impatiently grumbling, "what has all this got to do with Pamela Sargent?"

Mostly this: Writers write, and truly dedicated writers write whether their reward is adulation or adversity, fame or obscurity, prizes for misfires or peanuts for masterpieces. Pamela Sargent is a writer dedicated to her profession, not also one who apparently has no proclivity at all for gregarious self-touting. She lets the work that she produces at the typewriter speak for her. Over the past sixteen years, it has spoken eloquently enough that she has won an enviable following and the admiration of many of her most perceptive and hard-to-please colleagues, including Algis Budrys, Gregory Benford, James Gunn, and (if I may immediately lay claim to at least a degree of perception) the undersigned. And, to repeat, Sargent has achieved this success by giving herself almost wholly to the primary task of any writer, writing.

Her novels include *Cloned Lives*, an impressive seminal work on the human impact of new biological technologies; *The Sudden Star*, a scary disaster novel done with the hard-boiled panache of James M. Cain; *Watchstar*, a lyrical adventure and a far-future quest for knowledge; *The Golden Space*, which Algis Budrys has legitimately cited as a benchmark achievement in sf speculation about human immortality; *The Alien Upstairs*, whose title hints provocatively at its subject matter, a trio of admirable novels for younger readers, from whom adults can also take much pleasure (*Earthseed*, *Eye of the Comet*, and *Homesmind*); and two formidable but quietly elegant "blockbusters," *Venus of Dreams* and *The Shore of Women*, both of which appeared in 1986. *Venus of Dreams*, the first novel in a trilogy, convincingly details the transformation of Venus into a livable human world, while *The Shore of Women*, a love story set against the postnuclear backdrop of a society fashioned by and for women, elicited enthusiastic responses from France and England even before its appearance in the United States.

Further, Pamela Sargent has published a collection of her early stories, *Starshadows*, and has edited three noteworthy anthologies of science fiction by women: *Women of Wonder*, *More Women of Wonder*, and *The New Women of Wonder*. *Blo-Futures* is yet another editorial effort accomplished solo; and she has co-edited with England's Ian Watson what I regard as the best one-shot sf anthology of 1986, the intelligently compiled *Afterlives*, with more than a dozen new tales (by James Gunn, Leigh Kennedy, Gene Wolfe, Jody Coster, Rudy Rucker, Howard Waldrop,

and others) and seven reprints by such inimitable talents as J.G. Ballard, James Blish, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Pamela Sargent herself—with a well-considered revision of a story that you will discover in its revised form in this collection, "If Ever I Should Leave You."

What amazes about this undeniably remarkable accomplishment is not the accolades that Sargent has won (for she deserves them), but the fact that in some quarters she remains either an ungrased or a ludicrously unacknowledged force in the fields of science-fiction and fantasy letters.

For instance?

Attend: Neither the collective readership known as fandom nor the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) have found the grace or demonstrated the perspicacity to honor Sargent's contributions with an award. No Lucille blocks (Nebulas) or silver rocketships (Hugos) sit on her shelves; and her quiet but probing fiction has rarely—indeed, if ever—landed on the final ballots of either of these purported indices of quality in the sf and fantasy fields, an oversight that after only a moment's consideration boggles the mind. Sargent has somewhat wittily joked that she does not even qualify for the lugubrious camaraderie of the Hugo & Nebula Losers Club, membership in which provides a glum sort of consolation to writers who have just seen luckier and often more visible—though not always more talented—fellow storytellers walk away with the aforementioned doorposts and desk nametags.

But, of course, awards in any field of endeavor—television, film, theatre, postal delivery—are iffy commodities at best, and it would be foolish to make too much of the fact that fandom and the SFWA have alike fallen down in failing to give closer attention to the invention and integrity of Pamela Sargent's oeuvre.

However, attend again: At this writing, a major figure in the science-fiction world, and one of Great Britain's foremost men of letters, Brian Aldiss, has just allowed the publication of a book, the revision of a 1973 tome, purporting to be "The History of Science Fiction." He has updated this earlier effort to include "timely" references to such solid new talents as James Morrow, Mary Gentle, and Greg Bear. Unbelievably, and inexcusably, however, this same book contains not a single word about the long-standing achievement of Pamela Sargent, whose name—were justice served—should appear in the index between "Sandman, The," see E.T.A. Hoffman" and "Saturn 3 (1980), 274" and whose contrivances to the field should occupy at least as many pages of text as Aldiss generously allots to, say, Michael Bishop. (An example I employ not for purposes of self-puffery, but to deflect the suspicion that I have a private axe to grind. I don't. I have only minor nits to pick with Aldiss's relatively generous assessment of my work.) What Pamela Sargent herself must think of this latest oversight, I have no idea. But believe it or not, almost by itself, it sabotages a major portion of the credibility of an otherwise comprehensive and valuable history, and I pray that Aldiss survives long enough to rectify his mistake in a third revision. To be on the safe side, I advise him to begin work at once.

"Why these oversights?" some readers might begin to ask. "Is it conceivably because Ms. Sargent lacks the ability of the award

winners? Is it conceivably because she lacks the hipness of these with-it new writers who call themselves, or who happily suffer the label, cyberpunk?"

The answer to the first question is "No, it isn't conceivable"; the answer to the second is "Are you kidding?"

I have my own theories about Pamela Sargent's failure to knock fandom and the unwashed masses of her fellow writers dead, theories that I likewise explain—or go a small way toward explaining—the inability, or the unwillingness, of a major figure like Aldiss and his collaborator on this self-labeled "History of Science Fiction" to recognize the breadth and depth of her contributions. First, Pamela Sargent eschews self-promotion. She has neither the disposition nor the taste for it. In one of this collection's wittiest stories, "The Novella Race," she postulates a tomorrow in which writing becomes an Olympic event, with all the cachet of pole-vaulting and lugging. The story brims with inside jokes about the craft and profession of writing, but it also offers a poignant character study of the narrator, whom—throwing not only caution but also academic critical orthodoxy to the winds—I cannot help identifying with Sargent herself:

My stock-in-trade was unobtrusiveness and self-doubt. I would have preferred being a colorful character like Karath [somewhat of a Harlan Ellison figure in the story] but I could never have carried that off. Being quiet might not win many points, but there was always a chance the judges would react unfavorably to histrionics and give points to a shy writer.

Later, the narrator ponders another writer's observation that Huono, who has never won a medal, may be the best of them all:

If she was the best, it meant that inferior writers defeated her regularly. And if that was true, it might mean that inferior writers beat better ones in all contests. MacSloftain, I recalled uncomfortably, believed that APOLLO [the computer judge] picked the winners at random, although the human judges might give you an edge. The Olympic committee denied this, but we all knew that MacSloftain's sister had taken a gold in cybernetics. She might have told him something.

Sargent attends few conventions. By her own self-confession, she is uncomfortable speaking to groups. Therefore, she stays home and does what she does best: write. Unfortunately, the failure to self-promote—in a field conspicuously geared to that activity—too often renders one invisible, or nearly so; and this translates into the general perception, especially among fans, writers, and academics who enjoy the social aspects of their sf involvement more than they do reading, that you Do Not Exist.

Second, Pamela Sargent's editorship of the aforementioned *Women of Wonder* anthologies—containing stories exclusively by women, and frequently about women as well—gave her a reputation as a feminist (which she unapologetically is) that did not go down well in some quarters. I feel sure that certain male writers resented the compilation of the books, even as correctives to the

male-oriented stories and anthologies of earlier eras, that deliberately excluded their work on the basis of gender. Some used the premises of these anthologies to cry, rather blindly, "Foul!" and some may well have dismissed Sargent's own fiction as the work of an ideologue, when the truth--as **The Best of Pamela Sargent** demonstrates--is that she is a humanist after the fashion of Ursula K. Le Guin, Kate Wilhelm, and such relative newcomers as Connie Willis and Nancy Kress. Even the story "Fears," which posits an all-male dystopia while limning the fears of its outcast narrator-protagonist, never loses sight of the damaged humanity of all its characters.

Third, Pamela Sargent has as capable a command of fantasy as she does of science fiction. This would seem to be a virtue, but often the ability to straddle, yoke, or mix-and-match categories diffuses rather than solidifies a writer's audience. Critics who confine themselves to hector miss your sf while those who debunk or extoll the latest space opera miss your idiosyncratic dark fantasy, with the unhappy result that you fall between stools and go down to dismaying anonymity wondering what the hell happened. Sargent has not quite suffered this fate, but it may be the case that her range has occasionally played against her.

Consider this collection. Each of these fourteen stories is an exemplar of "imaginative fiction," by which I mean either science fiction, horror, or fantasy. Nine, by my reckoning, qualify as sf, while the other five strike me as stories in which fantasy elements predominate. These latter five include "Out of Place," a funny story in which people suddenly find themselves able to eavesdrop on the thoughts of animals; "The Broken Hoop," a persuasive historical tale about an Indian woman caught between two worlds; "The Shrine," a contemporary horror story that recently came to our nation's TV screens on the syndicated series **Tales from the Darkside**; "The Old Darkness," another horror story but one in which the gothic element derives from a quintessentially modern phenomenon, a power failure; and "The Mountain Cage," in which the reader gets a glimpse of the Holocaust from the unusual point-of-view of Hurr, a cat. Indeed, this last story is a kind of *modern Watership Down* (antidating Tad Williams' *Tailchaser's Song* by a year or two), with felines taking the place of long-eared lagomorphs.

Even within the nine science-fiction stories, Sargent's range is noteworthy and enviable. She treats of many of the classic sf themes and in each case brings something new and pertinent to her use of them. "Shadows" takes and opens up the subject of alien invasion. "If Ever I Should Leave You" is a time-travel tale about both death and longing. "Bond and Free" examines a world in which superpowers have become commonplace, but from the perspective of an institutionalized person with the handicap of what you and I would call "normality." "Gather Blue Rose" has as its subject a variety of telepathic talent--universal empathy--that proves, to more than one of its characters, a greater bane than blessing. "Heavenly Flowers" considers a postnuclear world from the hapless vantage of the survivors, who want, above all else, to remember the causes and extent of the destruction. "Clone Sister" is a darling, but not tawdry or sensational, study of a new variety

of incest; and "The Summer's Dust" gives dramatic impetus to the notion that with the coming of immortality, one thing that dies is the prospect for genuine change. "The Novella Race" and "Fears" I have already mentioned in other contexts.

Let me repeat: Sargent's range, her refusal to confine herself to this genre or that, may occasionally work against her when the world starts looking for writers to whom to apply superlatives: the best sf writer, the best modern fantasist, or the best purveyor of contemporary horror. She may not be (even Sargent, I think, would admit this) the mythological "best" in any single one of these sometimes arbitrary categories, but she excels in all of them, and perhaps her doing so has scattered her audience and discommodated some of our critics and historians.

Fourth, Sargent's style is never flamboyant, and the stories themselves--as already implied--never resort to sensationalism or shoddy melodrama to heighten their impact. A generation raised on the **Star Wars** films, music videos, and the explicit brutalities of most latter-day horror movies (not to mention the evening news) is often less than well-equipped to cope with thoughtfulness, and Sargent's work almost always reveals that very quality. Her spare, quiet prose--which rarely draws attention to itself, preferring to convey information rather than to jump up and down bleating, "Hey, look at my exotic syntax! Behold my mastery of jargon, neologisms, and pseudo-scientific buzzwords!"--deserves closer attention than anyone has yet given it, particularly when it functions to reveal the mental states of Sargent's characters as well as to advance the forward movement of her stories. Attend this simple but evocative passage from "The Mountain Cage," in which Hurr sees a "herd" of Nazi limousines arrive at Hitler's headquarters:

Several two-legged ones in gray skins stood by the gate; two of them walked over to the first metal beast; and peered inside its openings, then stepped back, raising their right arms as others opened the gate and let the first beast pass. The two moved on to the next beast, looking in at the ones inside, then raised their arms again. The flapping arms reminded Hurr of birds; he imagined the men lifting from the ground, arms flapping as they drifted up in lopsided flight.

Good, clear writing in the service of an allegorical critique of the "attractiveness" of Nazism--the virtues of simplicity and thoughtfulness in the same story. At a time when high-tech glitz--a decadent infatuation with bright or grungy surfaces--has become a hallmark of our most popular mass-culture entertainments, from movies to music videos to SF novels.

Which brings me to my fifth and final point. Pamela Sargent's first story--not included here--appeared in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* in 1970. Throughout that decade and into the early years of the 1980s, she developed and grew as a writer, producing solid and in some cases groundbreaking work as her talent matured. Other writers created more stir and topped more awards, but, although she occasionally and altogether understandably fell prey to self-doubt, she persevered. She kept writing. She allowed

her dedication to the profession to carry her over the rough places, and she bided her time in the expectation--well justified--of some belated acknowledgement of her achievement.

In the 1980s, however, a new militancy--a new sense of vision and drive--gripped many of the sf field's younger writers, those variously hailed as everything from cyberpunks to Neuromantics to outlaw technologists; and the noise that their stories and novels made, along with their flair for confrontational and sensationalist, and proselytizing (some of which was blood-stirring and amusing; a lot of which was adolescent, crass, and needlessly divisive), tended in some cases to drown out the voices of writers who had come to their maturity in the 1970s. The hoopla attending the appearance of such notable talents as William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, for instance, has led some people to the nitwit belief that nothing of importance occurred in the sf field between the demise of the New Wave in the late 60s/early 70s and the appearance of Gibson's first "romantic, cybernetic, radical-hard sf" story in *Omnib*.

As much as I like the better efforts of some of these writers--Sterling's novel *Schismatrix* prompted an unabashed fan letter--just that much do I deplore the way in which the attendant hoopla and propaganda has mindlessly overwhelmed the voices of the good writers who preceded them. Notably, Pamela Sargent's. Cyberpunk proponents might well reply, "Well, she could get a copying machine and put out a self-promoting agitprop broadsheet of her own"--to which the obvious answer is, "Why the hell should she, or anyone else, have to?" Writers, as I said at the opening of this article, write. Although agitprop is admittedly a variety of that activity (the way that letting wind might be construed as a variety of music-making), it is not the sort of writing to which I am pointing when I declare "writers write" and cite Pamela Sargent as a praiseworthy example of that dictum.

No Hugo. No Nebula. No mention in a long-awaited history of the field that--in trying to be as up-to-the-minute as it can--falls all over itself to comment on some titles from the mid-1980s that may well prove as ephemeral as summer midges. Pamela Sargent deserves far better, and **The Best of Pamela Sargent**, the collection now in your hands, provides tangible proof of the shamefulness of these oversights. It also, to my way of thinking, manages to rectify them to some small extent, for if a writer writes, the most lasting legacy of that honorable activity is not the money that it makes, or the prizes that it accrues, or the critical attention that it commands, but the books and stories that come out of it and the impact that these artifacts have on the people who read them.

If you are sitting down to reread a Pamela Sargent story, you already know and value what its impact is likely to be. If you are coming to her work for the first time, get ready to be surprised, astonished, amused, provoked, stimulated, and moved. Write words. Of course, so that readers may read, and you are fortunate to find yourself in the capable, caring hands of this capable, caring writer. Indeed, the only literary advice that I can think to tender her is advice designed to prolong her career: "Pam, when the hell are you going to give up those friggin' cigarettes?"



# GREG BEAR

Photo: Skip Juris



by Pascal J. Thomas

The first time I saw Greg Bear, he was smiling widely and clutching two brand new Nebulas: "Blood Music" and "Hardfought" had brought him what "Petra" and many other fine stories had failed to. Come Hugo time, he was around again at the Los Angeles Worldcon, and by the time I drove down to meet him in San Diego --January 1985--I was surprised to learn I was the first person in the SF field to interview him. By the time you read this, Bear's sixth and seventh novels, *Blood Music* and *Eon*, should have widened his reputation.

Greg and Astrid (nee Anderson) Bear received me in the Spring Valley home from which they were preparing to move to a house farther out. It was crammed with books --"I am fascinated by large buildings because I need a large house to put all the books", Greg Bear says playfully. Fending off the occasional attempts by the microphone-eating cat, we talked in the parlor where I had found Greg reading a book on information theory, a sign of the eclectic interests he has to match his eclectic background.

**THRUST:** Could you share with us a little about your background?

**BEAR:** I was born here in San Diego in 1951, and since I was a Navy brat, I was hauled all over the world--at least the eastern part, Japan and the Philippines--before I was 8. Then Texas, then the East Coast for a while. The last of my father's tours of duty where we went along was Alaska, and we came back to San Diego. I have been living in Southern California ever since, for most of my life, 20

years out of 33. I have been writing at least since I was 8 years old. I remember putting together a little chapbook of my stories, illustrating them myself. I just loved telling stories. My grandmother sent me an odd collection of books for Christmas once, which--bless her--set me off in the right direction. E. E. Smith's *Skylark of Space*, *Starship by Aldiss*, a couple of others. She picked them at random, and it was a pretty good selection. As far as writing goes, I started submitting stories to *ANALOG* when I was 13. I made all the wrong decisions: single spaced, with cover letters longer than the story itself to explain what the story meant.

**THRUST:** I understand that you did sell early. **BEAR:** I sold a story to R. A. W. Lowndes when I was 15; it was published when I was 16 in *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*. I did not sell another one for five years, so it was an early fluke.

**THRUST:** Did you keep trying during those years?

**BEAR:** Oh yes. To *IF*, *GALAXY*, and of course to *ANALOG* still. I have a fair number of rejection slips from Campbell, but I never sold to him. I had already written my first novel by the time I was 19. I had already sold my first story, and I was working hard on the kind of stuff that I am selling now. In fact, the book that I finished when I was 19 was an early version of *The Infinity Concerto*. There are only three or four pages in the final book taken from the first version. I have been mining my past thoroughly. My work today is

about 20 percent finally doing old stories right, and 80 percent brand new ideas. At the same time, I have been painting since I was about 10 or 11. My first really successful painting was when I was 16 or 17, and I started selling in the art shows at conventions at about the same time.

**THRUST:** So you were painting and writing at the same time.

**BEAR:** I was probably doing more writing than painting, but it's very hard to take manuscripts around and show them to people.

**THRUST:** Have you done anything else in your life beside writing and painting? Have you ever held a regular job?

**BEAR:** Mostly working in bookstores, which was connected to writing. I did a fair amount of teaching, mostly free-lance type. I worked as a chemistry lab assistant in my high school just after graduating, and three years later, at 19, became a teacher's aide in an art class there. Finally, after I moved up to L.A., I was approached by the gifted program in San Diego to conduct programs on SF. That expanded into doing free-lance programs on ancient history, science and SF. That was after I became a full-time writer, in 1975. Until then, I worked in bookstores.

**THRUST:** So it looks like you spent all your life in the SF milieu.

**BEAR:** Pretty much. There was a six-month period when I was working with the Space Theater here in San Diego, a spectacular institution. I had all those visions of what I wanted to do with the Space Theater. And I think the reason why the management eventually edged me out was that they would want to be the head of the institution in a few years. Getting rid of your competition early! I was a very naive, brash 23-year-old at the time, and did not know the ways of company politics.

**THRUST:** Isn't it a bit oppressing to be within the SF world all your life?

**BEAR:** No, I have never found it so. The opportunities offered were so good, and the overall level of intellect so high, that I could not think of any place else I where I could get that kind of stimulation, short of, perhaps, working in a scientific field. I never lacked for interesting people with interesting ideas. Most of the people I would invite to a party at my house are those who like science fiction. Everybody else would be rather dull: They would not be able to keep up with the conversation. A party at our house encompasses physicists, people doing research in space flight, poets, fantasy writers, artists. We are not on the intellectually deprived side of life! We are the other half. As far as being held back: No. I never felt held back or frustrated. If it is a ghetto, it encompasses the whole universe. As a writer, if you want to write a mainstream novel, your chances of getting published in the first place are extremely slim. You can write a very fine mainstream novel and have it completely ignored; you can write a mediocre SF book and it is guaranteed to sell some 20,000 copies. If you're a young writer, you can sell in SF and get better known. If you are writing mainstream stories, you will not find too many markets--certainly few that will pay well. So there are more opportunities in SF than outside.



**THRUST:** Talking about science, did you have any formal education in it?

**BEAR:** I took a lot of science at the university. I just found out, after fudging calculus, that I was not cut out to be a professional in the field. At least at that time. If I had worked a little harder, had had a different set of professors, it might have been different. But I was always aiming at being a writer, and being a scientist I would have spent more time writing. At most I could have been someone like David Brin, who spends about half of his time writing and half of it doing science.

**THRUST:** What would you say is your favorite form of SF?

**BEAR:** I am fascinated by science. I consider hard science fiction to be probably the best and the purest form of science fiction, and while I run all over the spectrum and write fantasy, horror, soft science fiction and surrealistic science fiction, I always come back to hard science fiction. Fantasy is to me a way of relaxing and letting the poetic part come out, because you can free-associate and come up with ideas and images that are really pleasant, and think, "Wow, that was fun, let's do some more!" Hard science fiction is much more work. You have to be especially consistent, to develop all aspects of the ideas that you are working with. If you're working in the far future—as I often do—you have to develop the societies, the languages, the religions, the cultural context... and technology. And to think of what the science will be like at that time; it won't be like it is now. You are really playing with all the stops pulled out. The last book I finished, *Eon*, was a solid year-long effort, every minute of which was like pulling teeth. To get it right, I had to research Russian military thinking, near future defense strategies, and create a society entirely based on what we think of as information theory and computers. On top of that, I invented an artificial world that is infinitely large. Doing all of this was fun, but much more rigorous fun. Now I am relaxing, writing the second part of *The Infinity Concerto*, *The Serpent Mage*. And it's more like writing a mainstream book. I have found that writing a modern domestic novel, or a social novel, is quite relaxing compared to writing science fiction.

**THRUST:** Have you tried to do that?  
**BEAR:** Not yet! But yes, in the bits and pieces I have done in horror and fantasy novels. These parts are considerably easier, because you can write from your own experience.

**THRUST:** What would be your favorite field of human endeavor? Science, philosophy, the arts? And how do you deal with the science that you do introduce into your works, since you are not a pro at it?

**BEAR:** They are really inseparable to me. There are moments when I switch phases and become an artist, thinking visually; then I'll become a scientist, say a physicist. After *Blood Music*, I can now switch over to thinking biologically. I did a lot of research on that. I had a very good time meeting people and talking with them. So really I am a gadfly. I can jump about to any of those areas. If I can pull the wool over a scientist's eyes, as I apparently did in *Blood Music*, and let them think that perhaps the person who wrote the story had done some of that science, or at

least knew enough of it to not screw up, then that's a magic trick. Because, as much as I enjoy following the work of scientists, I am not a scientist, I have never done research. It's a very enjoyable playact at being a scientist. If I create a mathematician character, I have fun being a mathematician while I'm thinking. And if a mathematician reads about that character and says, "Yes, that could be the way it's done," then I'm happy. Music is becoming very important now in my stories. In *The Infinity Concerto*, it was significant but not important to the story. In *The Serpent Mage*, we'll have a replaying of the *Infinity Concerto*, and the so-called Song of Power which links all the universes together turns out to be Mahler's Tenth Symphony, in its accurately completed form. One of the themes in both books is artwork which never gets a chance to be finished, or the people who are interferred with in the midst of finishing great works of art, like Coleridge or Mozart. But one of my statements to all writers who want to write SF is "garbage in, garbage out." If you are reading fiction, you have to read material done by authors who are better than you are, who are doing things that you can't do. If you slum and read bad space opera or bad sword and sorcery to relax, you are wasting your time. In some ways, it's like being a priest: You have to be on call all the time. The only books I read with pleasure are books by authors who are doing things better than I can. There are fewer of them nowadays, but they are there! I go and mine Charles Dickens for a six-month period, and then I go back and read Henry James, and in between I am reading Stephen King, because he is also doing things I can't. I am learning from all of them. Also from Benford, from Brin. Occasionally I see people come along like Kim Stanley Robinson, and I see things that I am not doing as well as he is, so I start sprucing up in those areas. In other words, I am always looking around me in the track race, both at the people ahead of me and at those coming up on the rear.

**THRUST:** You seem to write a lot about religion, so what are your thoughts on the subject?

**BEAR:** I am not associated with any fixed religious beliefs. What religious beliefs I have I refuse to impose on the Universe for very good reasons. I feel that I am not bright or creative enough to encompass anything that would have created what is already around me. So if I theorize about it, it has to be in terms of play, because to be serious would be sacrilegious. How could I possibly make any worthwhile theory about a Universe which is much more creative than I am?

**THRUST:** And what are your feelings toward those religions which are already organized?

**BEAR:** I have a love-hate relationship with all of them. Especially with Judeo-Christianity. If I had to fix myself into a specific moral mold, it would have to be the Christian mold. I would take much more of the Jewish tradition of law and respect for nature that seems to have been abandoned in modern Christianity, and mix it back in. On the other hand, there are a lot of wonderful things to be found in the cosmology of the Hindus, or the sort of negation of the Buddhists. If you attend a feast, and all you do is sit down and eat

chicken legs, you are wasting your time. I basically go along with what Joseph Campbell said. I think, in the final volume of *The Masks of God*, the highest art that a human being can achieve is to create his own religion, a religion above and outside the religion of his upbringing or his peers. It would be kind of chaotic. There would not be many churches, but the parties would be much more interesting!

**THRUST:** Of course, churches try to impose cohesion and unity.

**BEAR:** They would be out of work. When you are in a cushy position, you tend to like to keep it that way. The whole reason Christianity has lasted so long is that it has certain flaws that I would have eliminated. To speak bluntly, if I had been Christ, I would not have said certain things. The church would not have existed either. You cannot have a good religion that will last thousands of years. Those which last thousands of years may have many good parts, but they also have very bad parts that kill a lot of people, and result in stultification and lack of progress. So, if you want to make something that will last several thousand years, take to architecture.

**THRUST:** Which is connected to religion: See the cathedrals.

**BEAR:** It may be what I was trying to say in "Petra." A lot of my stories written about religion are concerned with the death of religions, or their basic moral flaws. Anything that is against imagination, against the creativity of the individual, or the free flow of thought that I consider essential to my life, is evil.

**THRUST:** That's what we see in *Strength of Stones*: the death of the inflexible, robotized, religion-tailored cities.

**BEAR:** Remember also, and this confuses me to some extent, that those cities are paradises. Potential for paradise is there, but one flaw destroys them and makes them inaccessible to normal people. The religions that created those cities were theoretically beautiful, wonderfully conceived, I tried to give them every benefit of the doubt. But I could not leave out the fact that human beings could not live in them. In that case, I was probably mixing up fundamentalist religions. When you become a fundamentalist, you are entering an area of religious pathology, where you are no longer operating in the real world. In a sense, I consider fundamentalism to be a mass psychosis.

**THRUST:** The most beautiful religions are cities you cannot live in; would this also apply to political systems?

**BEAR:** I don't know. I have not done much writing about politics yet. Most of my systems tend to be loosely defined in terms of economic structure. I am interested in political structure as management structure. But political philosophy. I have yet to have done any Marxist speculation. I consider Marxist systems to be far more iniquitous than anything Christianity ever devised, far more rigorous and deadly to human creativity. I tend to go along with Jean-Francois Revel (*Without Mary and Jesus*). It's a good place to start. Cut off most of Jesus, cut off all of Marx, and begin again.

**THRUST:** Is that also a political creed for the

here-and-now?

**BEAR:** I keep calling myself a liberal, and running up against what people are now defining as conservative things within me. I am not sure whether it is because I am becoming a conservative. I think it is because liberalism is becoming kind of sick: All its failures are showing up right now. I have always been a reggie liberal, since I am a registered Republican—to help the Republicans choose better candidates. Then it turned out that the Democrats needed help in choosing better candidates, and I could not help them. So they chose Mondale, and I ended up on the opposite side of the coin. And now the conservatives are talking about change, and the liberals are talking about it. So we are seeing a revolution in conservatism, whereas the liberals are scrambling very hard to stay where they were in the first place.

**THRUST:** Let's get back to writing. You are writing mostly novels now.

**BEAR:** Two books being published in two months is either fortuitous or bad luck. I'm not sure which. I tend to write a fair amount during each year, an average of one to two books a year.

**THRUST:** Have you switched to novels because you are getting the hang of it, or because there is more of a demand? **BEAR:** There is more money for novels, in general. Some markets pay a large amount of money for short stories, but it is very difficult to make a living solely off short stories. There's a lot more work per word in a short story than in a novel. "Hardfought" took four months to craft. I could have written a book in that time period.

**THRUST:** Is there any other difference in the writing? I remember hearing you say you're not allowed to be as downbeat in a novel as in a short story.

**BEAR:** In a short story, the readers' attention is not focused for as long a period, they don't have as much of an investment. So in a lot of ways, you can be more experimental. You can hold their attention across 5,000 words. But if they look at a book which is 600 pages long, and is going to be that difficult for 600 pages, they really have to be committed to it. Very few readers in or out of SF are so committed to literature that they will spend a significant portion of their lives reading something that difficult. Unless they are absolutely positive it is brilliant and must be read. "Hardfought" is an example of such a story, and its publication signals a change in ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE policies, which we discussed for a while. "Hardfought" is a difficult story in almost any sense. It has a new language: The main characters, whether human or extra terrestrial, are alien to us. The physics are difficult, and so are the several levels of plotting... and three characters having the same name! What I find interesting and rewarding is that people read it anyway, and were impressed by it. But it was obvious from the beginning that, if it was going to win any award, it was more of a Nebula- than a Hugo-type story. Hugo stories go for a little less experimentation in form, and a little more concentration on plot and idea. Which I suppose was why "Blood Music" won one.

**THRUST:** Could something like "Hardfought" be done at novel length?

**BEAR:** I think so. In fact, "Hardfought" is a very condensed novel; it probably should have been longer. But I would not want to do it, for my own health. Eon is the closest I have come to doing stuff as difficult as "Hardfought." I don't think it's as difficult to read, because it is expanded over eight times the space. But it was really a chore to maintain that level of thinking. My attitude is that, if I am going to write a book, I cannot start with the cliché version of whatever I am writing about. I have to reverse it or think up something new, and that gets exhausting after a while. It's like standing on one's toes for eight months, and finally the toes give out and you have to collapse. So after the completion of Eon, I spent about a month doing very little. I wrote one short story, letting the brain cells get back into some semblance of order. Eon will be out almost immediately upon the heels of Blood Music. It's a 165,000-word-long novel, almost a catch-all book: It started out as an artificial world idea, and ended up being an SF novel with virtually everything in it. I talked earlier about the things I had to research. It has World War III, a huge artificial world, an asteroid starship, dozens of alien species, only a few of which are really described in detail. It has a time-scale of, on one level, a few dozen years, on the next level, a few thousand years, on the level after that, an eon. It has alternate universes. The main character is a young woman, and there are 65 speaking roles in the book... and that does not describe it at all! It's the most difficult book I have ever written.

**THRUST:** Is it the most satisfying as well? **BEAR:** It might be. After the editing is all done, and when it's in a more elegant form, I will be very happy.

**THRUST:** Isn't reader satisfaction higher in the end if you have to do a bit more work?

**BEAR:** You have to guarantee to the reader that something worthwhile is going to come out of this work. If all you're chewing is fat and gristle. So what I had to do in that story ("Hardfought") was provide the meat, which for an SF reader is in terms of scope and sense of wonder, and the feeling of having experienced an alien culture—the closest you can come to an alien culture without actually meeting one. It was gratifying for me to find out that people felt they had got that out of the

**THRUST:** What is the first thing that comes into your mind when you write?

**BEAR:** Since I am writing novels now, I have a pretty good idea of what is going to happen in the book, in the sense of road sign telling the way, giving me directions. Anything between them is open territory. Usually I have key scenes or visions that will be fun to write, set along my way like bonbons along my trail. I have to go down the road to pick up the bonbons, and write a lot of material which leads to the particular high points that I enjoy writing. More and more, I am enjoying the basic craft of putting the story down, and making it elegant, so I am not just writing for the bonbons; I will put in a lot more thematic material and characterization. I will have to avoid solidifying, so it does not end up like plaster of Paris and I am all set up because I like the thematic material more than the fun stuff. The basic thing about writing science fiction is that it has to be entertaining. You can do anything so long as it is entertaining, and accessible to an audience with a very

high level of intelligence, and certain rigorous demands. I love spectacular things, and am quite involved with writing about huge concepts and wonderful visions. However, I am every bit as interested in human characters and what goes on in their heads. I once stood up in a panel at CalTech, a panel full of very fine SF writers, and an audience full of physicists and students, and said, "I am convinced that the inside of the human mind is every bit as wonderful a landscape as anything Chesley Bonestell ever painted." The reaction was a kind of mixed silence, so I am not sure I put it right, because what I meant was that Chesley Bonestell paintings are wonderful; they highly influenced me when I was a kid, but the inside of the human mind is as potentially interesting. For these people, Chesley Bonestell was dominant, and they had characters to fit within the landscape. What I want to do is fit Chesley Bonestell within the human landscape, and find those areas of the mind which have not been charted.

**THRUST:** You have been talking about revising your work. Have you actually done it a lot, or are you just planning to?

**BEAR:** Every time a book or story gets republished, if I am allowed, I make little changes. The books for which there are versions with major changes ready to be shipped off are *Psychone* and *Strength of Stones*, which was never copy-edited in the paperback version. I never got the manuscript back for copy-editing so it went out with a lot of errors. *Hegira*, I would change the ending on; it would not take very long. I would add an extra chapter. There are some books that I don't want to change—*Blood Music*, for instance. That is a book I am very happy with. The story was very condensed. It needed obvious expansion. Besides, the idea was nifty. So what I did was not so much expand it as to start over again, using some of the characters and situations. People found it difficult to imagine how the ending could be expanded upon, but in fact where the story ends is only halfway through the book. From that point on, it becomes a hard physics novel instead of a hard biology novel. The basic question being, what happens to a space-time continuum when you have a trillion intelligent beings per square centimeter? Do you have thought pollution in the Universe... a black hole of thought? It was a lot of fun to write and research. I have finally reached the point where I can hit the target most of the time, with most editors and readers.

**THRUST:** So what is the target?

**BEAR:** Having written a very good book, based on themes that are handled in an original way, if not themselves completely original, with characters that are acceptable as real human beings, with situations that are evocative. I try to satisfy all the basic demands of science fiction. One thing I avoid is going over old territory. If I do, I do it in an almost unrecognizable way. "Hardfought" was very old territory. It's really a space opera, but one of my favorite writers is Joseph Conrad, and all he was doing was writing sea stories, good old adventure stories that could have been published in *BOYS' LIFE* if they had been in a different form. What I try to do for SF is what Conrad did for sea stories. □

# THE ALIEN CRITIC



## Richard E. Geis

\*Mmpmh\* "Where...where am I? This page...it has a strange feel to it."

"Get all the way awake, Geis. You're in THRUST."

"I'm where? Alter! What have you done?"  
"I've signed us up for some reviewing. I was bored. You'd taken SFR away from me behind my back, and so..."

"Bah! You know I don't read SF or fantasy anymore."

"But I do, and through me you have a perfect knowledge of all that I have read, just as I know everything you've read, and

thought, and lusted after, and ---"

"And you expect me to join you in reviewing? I'll die first!"

"No, you won't. You'll have to say something about something. You always do. You're worse than I am that way."

"Well... This is going to be a vicious column, Alter. Between you and me..."

"I knew you'd say that. Shall we begin?"

\*Sigh\* "All right! What have you read first?"

"A fine time-waster for people like you, Geis, with nothing better to do with three or

four hours. I speak of *Stalking the Unicorn* by Mike Resnick, published by Tor in January of 1987. Serviceable cover by Boris Vallejo. \$3.50 in the USA, \$4.50 in Canada. Roughly fair pricing, I guess, given that the Canadian dollar is worth about 76 cents in American currency."

"Yeah, yeah. This is subtitled, 'A Fable of Tonight' which is rather pretentious since there's nothing fabulous about this workmanlike use of a New York down-and-nearly-out private detective employed by a lying, double-dealing elf from a fantasy New York---"

"Just down the corner, through the reality membrane---"

"---who wants him to find a missing unicorn. Don't interrupt me, Alter!"

"Look, Geis, whose column is this? Mine! Mind your place! Now, what bugs me about Mike Resnick is his misuse of talent. A guy who has the ability to write such fine dialogue, create such real characters---"

"And has such a great comedy touch---"

"Yes, comedy! Jokes! Weird creatures, fascinating repartee, mockery of all that middle-America finds sacred---"

"Alter! You are defending all that the Yuppies and Goddies value?"

"No, I just want Resnick to write something serious! Here he toys with the great mysteries of life: life and death, truth and reality, good and evil... He has this monstrously evil demon, the Grundy... The Grundy!"

"You think he's referring to Mrs. Grundy, the spirit of censorship and social control of personal conduct? That's pretty clever, don't you think? He's making a statement---"

"He's playing games! He's mixing seriousness and entertainment! He's operating on at least two levels! He's like Ron Goulart that way!"

"Alter, you're condemning him for fine writing! He's even set up a series here, as his detective, John Justin Mallory, is marooned in this fantasy New York for seemingly the rest of his life and decides to set up a detective agency with a woman partner, Col. Winifred Carruthers, and adopts (with her permission) a female cat-person named Felina."

"But, Geis, his bits of business! An endless, 35-year chess game being played in an outdoor cafe in the dead of night, in all kinds of weather! A Museum of Natural History in which the exhibits come to life for an hour each night! A New York Stock Exchange haunted by phantoms who have fed on raw emotion and who are now dying because of computerization! A cafe full of racist gnomes---"

"All excellent satiric diversions and alarums. The man's inventiveness astounds me."

"It depresses me, Alter. He should be serious for a change! I'm tired of talking about this novel!"

"You tire easily, Geis. Where's that old stamina, that endurance?"

"It's an endurance vile. For Ghod's sake, Alter, leave me alone! Let me enjoy my retirement. Is there no mercy in you?"

"None at all. I think of all the stupid editorials, all the self-serving commentaries, even all those columns in GALAXY I had to collaborate on with you, and I rejoice in the turning of tables. I am in command, here, Geis, in the brain, pending the return of... No, wrong script. Nevertheless, this column is mine, and you are condemned to obey me. We will now review a *Star Trek* novel."

"Oh! Nol N-not---"

"And this one is by Gene DeWeese, a long-time friend of yours and a long-time columnist for SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW."

"What a dirty trick! Now, out of friendship---"

"Exactly, there are no tactics too low for me to use, Geis. I'm putting you on the spot, on the knife edge of honesty and integrity. How does it feel?"

"Painful. At least, no, you're not going to mention---"

"YES! Ha. Double HA! Gene wrote a little note in the review/complimentary copy he sent: 'For Dick, without whose timely withdrawal this would have never been possible...' Care to explain to the readers exactly what that cryptic note means?"

"No."

"I didn't think so. But I'll explain it for you. It seems that a couple years ago you and Gene considered collaborating on a science fiction novel. Gene had an unsold *Star Trek* chapters--and outline which he thought might be subject to conversion to a straight SF novel, and he sent it to you for a look--see, to find out if you'd like to do the carpentry and first draft. You said yes, but then something intervened...a novel sold to Fawcett you had to write?"

"I don't remember, Alter. Something like that."

"So you sent back the ms. and Gene sent it back to his agent and his agent sent it back to Pocket Books for another look, and damned if they didn't buy it."

"Yes. So?"

"So *Chain of Attack*, no. 32 of the *Star Trek* series, is now available at \$3.50. It was published in February of this year. And since you have a kind of special interest in the novel, would you care to make the first comment?"

"You're not going to let me off the hook, are you?"

"Nope. See my eyes glittering with malicious glee?"

"Yes. Feral hatred. You've always hated me, haven't you, Alter?"

"That's true, Geis, but don't try to change the subject. What about *Chain of Attack*?"

"OK. It seemed to me, when I read the partial, that it was an extended *Star Trek* novelization of an ST script. That is, it was set up with only a few sets and action sequences, with most of the activity being conducted on the bridge of the Enterprise. The story involved the Enterprise being marooned somewhere in a distant galaxy after passing through an undetectable 'gate' between our galaxy and the other."

"You also noted a limited number of characters, and a kind of ST script formula, with one internal threat and an ongoing external mystery/treat."

"Yes, yes. The familiar Federation politician on board who tries to foment mutiny when he discovers himself in an alien galaxy, with people he cannot endure, for the rest of his life. The outside threat is the area of devastated, destroyed, seared, killed *Enterprise*-like planets in the dense star cluster the 'gate' had delivered them to."

"Yeah, and then they encounter two separate alien races who attack anything in sight (including each other) and who are suicidally intent on killing themselves if captured."

"A puzzlement, eh, Geis?"

"At first. But the resourceful Kirk and crew manage to transport one set of aliens aboard, pacify them, educate them, make friends and then transport a VIP alien from the other race. Each think the other responsible for the destruction of most of the cluster's livable planets and for the disappearances of spaceships."

"Their ships had accidentally fallen victim to 'gates' like the one which deposited the Enterprise in their galaxy."

"Exactly. So do-gooders Kirk, Spock, McCoy, etc. set things to rights and find a way back to Earth."

"Evaluation, Geis?"

"You do it Alter. Take this bitter cup from my lips."

"Sip, Geis. Evaluate."

"As Socrates said, 'I drank WHAT?' I will obey your unholy, unkind, unprincipled, uncaring, uncutful command. But I want Gene to know---"

"Shut up and do it, Geis! I've got another book here to review! I swear, your agonizing is a pain in the synapse!"

"All right. I found it an enjoyable, gripping well-done *Star Trek* novel. Gene had the characters down pat. Maybe too pat. McCoy seems too jump-first idealistic doctor, and Spock is 'Spock! Kirk is pure idealistic keen-minded hero and the others are names and actions. Scotty is a bit of an accent and nothing else. There are interiors (inner thoughts) by all the major characters, but, with the exception of Dr. Crandall, the Federation politician-scientist, there's nothing intimate or personal going on. Nothing essentially individual or original."

"That's unfair of you, isn't it? The holders of the trade mark on *Star Trek* probably do not want deep emotions explored in the Kirk-Spock-McCoy-Sulu-Scotty-Etc. locus and would strenuously object if Kirk betrayed a lust for the toes of Lt. Uhura. So Gene DeWeese probably had a list of do's and don'ts he had to follow. You can't condemn a *Star Trek* novelist for the essential and unchanging and unchangeable characters he or she is dealing with. The templates are inviolable. Depart from the rigid set of personality and character quirks and limits at your peril---forced rewrite and possible expulsion from the *Star Trek* club."

"You're right, Alter, one doesn't change a winner. It's just...I'm not really complaining. I enjoyed the novel. Gene has a good, solid talent and can carry extended scenes, creating tension and interest and involvement, and make clear and coherent very complex plot and scientific elements which would stop me cold. I see that writing a *Star Trek* novel is no easy matter, and I eat humble pie."

"Yes, it is nice to hear you say that. Have a rotten crutled grape while you're at it. A serving of chocolate cake dissolved in tomato soup?"

"Yecch! Take it away. Take yourself away too, Alter! Let me go back to the Academy Awards."

"You can read about them in the paper tomorrow. We go on, on to another novel. This is the last I remember."

"Be my guest. What is the corpse-to-be?"

"It's titled *The Patch of the Odin Soldier*, and it is a Lincoln Blackthorne adventure, written by Geoffrey Marsh, who studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, England, who immigrated to the United States and who taught literature at Sloan Campion School.

This is a man with credentials! This is a man who knows writing, this is a man who is here writing formula, tongue-in-cheek bizarre adventures."

"Casting his pearls before American swine?"

"No, casting fake agates through windows. Now, Geis, I have to admit the writing is smooth and professional, with an engaging tilt to it, but I can't believe the things Marsh describes, and cannot believe the characters he produces and trots through these pages. Several years ago, I started to read the first Lincoln Blackthorne novel, *The King of Satan's Eyes*, and couldn't get but halfway through before incredibly overcame inertia."

"I see you got through this one to page 52, Alter. Is it fair to review a book you haven't read all the way through?"

"No, not completely fair. But I'm not a fair entity, Geis, and life is not fair. I didn't like the trick chapter endings, cliff-hanger gimmicks--a character aims at Blackthorne and pulls the trigger of a shotgun. End of chapter. The first lines of the next chapter reveal the shotgun was empty. That sort of manipulative, contemptible technique. He does that at the end of virtually every chapter. It gets tiresome very quickly."

"A fair criticism, Alter, but...who is this Lincoln Blackthorne, and why are people shooting at him, or trying to?"

"He's a New Jersey tailor, a longtime soldier of fortune who claims to prefer to sew in peace and quiet, but who continually is forced/pressured/conned into accepting mission impossible tasks for rich or greedy people, usually involving the finding or recovering of some arcane art object of great antiquity. In this case the object in an ancient Viking statuette which possesses miraculous supernatural powers. The villain wants it as a weapon with which to conquer the world!"

"Not another madman out to become world dictator?"

"Is there any other kind? But this is not a serious novel, Geis, and in addition--or in subtraction--this is a safe book, written to Doubleday's SF specifications: no real sex and very little real violence. The light touch and the mockery of the genre---a genre in itself---assure that even the blowing up of cabins and hotels is not taken really seriously."

"So, Alter, you're saying it is a self-defeating type novel."

"Bet your ass. If a reader cannot take action and characters seriously, it leaves very little caring or concern about the characters. The author doesn't give a damn, so why should the reader? In fact, this type of parody adventure makes it very easy to put the novel down and not pick it up again."

"Interesting. But why would an intellectual, literary type like Marsh write this kind of Indiana Jones type of adventure novel, and why would Doubleday publish it?"

"Marsh probably writes these Lincoln Blackthorne thrillers for money and for kicks. The satirical approach is to save his ego and reputation: he can dismiss these as simple diversions, not to be taken seriously, old boy! And Doubleday is assured of a safe product for juveniles who will read anything, and a steady library market--an assured little profit. That's the name of that game."

"You're cruel, Alter."

"I'm also out of books to review, Geis. Let's knock it off for a while."

"Thank God"

...in which John Shirley takes a closer look at a subject he touched on in this publication some years ago, and, along the way, answers the question: What the hell is GTSF?

There are two science fictions. Some will maintain that there are many more than that. But for me, only two science fictions stand out sharply: Genre SF and Genre-Transcendent SF. The latter, of course, incorporates other categories, among them Cyberpunk, and Humanist SF.

At the risk of giving Michael Bishop another opportunity to accuse me of getting silly with acronyms, let's refer to Genre-Transcendent SF as GTSF.

GTSF has different standards than Genre SF, because it has a different object. Genre SF's object is entertainment, nothing more.

Let me state outright that I understand and appreciate that kind of preference. If I'm feeling ill and want some escapism that won't engage my brain to the point where I'm draining energy, I grab a Genre SF or fantasy novel, and dream awake for awhile. I can understand wanting to make that your SF reading all the time. Why not? Life is hard enough. Life, indeed, often leaves us feeling ill.

But usually I prefer Genre-Transcendent Science Fiction, and this column is aimed at people who prefer GTSF. GSF fans will be offended by it.

So, Genre SF fans, fuck off. Go away. Don't waste your time. Turn to another article. I don't want your outraged letters, because I regard them as irrelevant. You'll be talking apples and I'll be talking oranges.

Are they gone? A few hanging around? After a while they'll drift away in search of a trivia quiz or something.

GTSF writers are writing to adult concerns. They're interested in entertaining, but they're equally interested in meaning, in the search for insight into the human condition (and the inhuman condition); in trying to understand our role in the universe, as Brian Aldiss (an important GTSF writer) has said; in teaching, and in admitting how much all of us have to learn. Their desire to create real characters matches the zeal of mainstream writers. They care about good prose, and are not afraid to reach for genuine poetry (in a restrained sort of way, hopefully). They're looking for answers. They're asking grown-up questions.

They're not afraid to offer political and economic alternatives to the system that encumbers us now. Or, if not alternatives, then criticisms of it or perhaps in-depth apologies for it. They are not necessarily (as Vincent Omerniveritas had it) "bound by the assumptions of middle-aged, middle-class white American males." Add to that right-wing Libertarian SDI enthusiasts.

And they write for the general public, and not particularly to the narrow concerns of fandom. Or, anyway, they write in a way that the educated among the general public can appreciate. And when they write about science, they achieve more than a gee-whiz flash in the pan. They explore the ramifications of technological advances in depth, including social and environmental issues. Or the conjectured technology may in fact be a metaphor, or a means of framing a metaphor. Whatever their technological interest is, it resonates beyond the surface considerations.

# MAKE IT SCREAM



## John Shirley

Urula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* was GTSF. Spinrad's work. Aldiss. Tiptrée. Kim Stanley Robinson. Nancy Kress. Lucius Shepard. Michael Swanwick. Gene Wolfe. Michael Bishop. Wilhelm. Ballard. Gibson. Tom Disch. James Morrow. Russ. Greg Bear. Bruce Sterling.

GTSF has always been there, in some form. H.G. Wells. Aldous Huxley. Damon Knight. David Lindsay. C.S. Lewis. Walter Miller. Algis Budrys. Delany. Pangborn. Phil Dick. Lem. Bester. Ellison. Bob Shaw. Early Zelazny. Mid-period Silverberg. Lots of others. Pohl and Kornbluth crossed over between the two. Yes, of course you'll find satire and cunning metaphor now and then in, oh, Heinlein, and Jack Vance (one of the few who can be both GSF and GTSF at once) and other GSF writers. But mostly the distinction between the two SFs holds water.

Frequently GTSF writers are found in GSF drag. My own early work, for example,

Silverberg, obviously. Michael Moorcock, early Phil Dick, early Spinrad, early Le Guin, numerous others. We had to write the genre stuff to get our chops at basic plotting, description, continuity, and just to get into print. Maybe I haven't quite emerged as a real GTSF writer yet—but that's where I'm headed. And, more to the point, that's what I like to read when I'm reading science fiction.

Most GTSF writers probably don't read a great deal of SF. They read it with a lot of other stuff. Their cultural food is a balanced diet, in all the arts. They're likely to be as much interested in Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* as in his *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

But when GTSF writers and readers meet, chances are it's at a science fiction convention. And that, my friends, is a woeful state of affairs.

Not long ago I was on a panel at a con asking that age-old question: "Why don't mainstream critics appreciate science fiction?"

We touched on a lot of reasons, coming up with a combination of their pigheaded prejudices and our own culpability for encouraging so much trashy SF and for marketing good SF as if it's the trashy variety. They look at these embarrassing genre—lurid covers, with women exposing their heaving breasts (as women evidently do in the future, in moments of stress) as the Burt Reynolds type beside her legs loose with his 10-inch blaster. They look at that packaging, often misleading, and of course their attitudes toward what they read are poisoned. GTSF too often isn't reaching its real audience—the general, educated adult—because it isn't marketed for adults, or, anyway, for people who want adult reading. The typical publisher's cynicism, their contempt for the public, leads them to assume the public is interested only in neurotic escapism and must be enticed with the same old moronic packaging gimmicks.

Too damn many professional SF illustrators seem to be of the same stamp. Their imagery is clichéd, heavy-handed, seems frantically bent on confirming Freud, and cutesy. You see the aspiring artists' work at the convention art shows, where they're unveiling the same old dragon tapestry, unicorn imagery, vaguely alien-spaceship-drifting-half-wrecked-in-space-with-alien-corpse-in-it imagery, barbarian-warrior-going-in-for-a-blastonishment-at-landing-spaceship imagery, and so on. Are these artists really pathologically tired or are they playing up to editors and publishing people they hope will see their works? Probably, in most cases, the latter. And they're slanting things for the Wanker Fans. Remind me to tell you about Wanker Fans in a moment.

If there are any Genre SF fans still with me, please understand that I'm not trying to be some sort of Scrooge. I can understand having anything at all for your hobby, even something that involves mostly tired old clichés—they're not tired to you, I know that. You should have your conventions and art shows as you like. And we who aren't into it should—

I'll get to that.

As a result of SF's misbegotten packaging, the confusion between Genre SF and Genre-Transcendent SF (which is, for me, the real SF) continues. Most people aren't aware that there's so much GTSF that it constitutes another type of fiction entirely. It is science fiction—it just isn't the same science fiction.

A fan in the audience (at the panel I mentioned) offered another reason for why mainstream critics dislike SF. He said, essentially, that the "Mundanes," as he called them, were simply jealous of the Stan-like superiority of science fiction readers and writers. They're jealous of our intellectual and imaginative superiority.

I told him his attitude was deplorable and an embarrassment to us all. But someone else said, "What did you expect at a con, Shirley?" I suppose there are people who have read GTSF and then checked out a convention to meet others into it...and were turned off to the whole thing by what they saw there.

Well, we know what they saw, right? Star Wars iconography. Dinosaur fetishism, barbarian fetishism. Dorsal fetishists trying to look dashing and instead looking like small children dressed up by their teachers for a grade school play. Obese women in skimpy

costumes getting their sensual woman ya-yas out, indulging in pathetic fertility-goddess exhibitionism to offset their day-to-day containment in nerdiness, and at night getting plastered and numbly fucking bored. Middle-aged SF hacks who're on leave from their shrewish wives. Equally nerdy men boring the hell out of each other with the details of their sword-smithing and amateur armor-making. Tables of medieval weapons and tacky "fantasy art" jewelry. The 10,000th showing of *Forbidden Planet*. Trekkies wearing The Ears and facial expressions in imitation of Vulcan austerity. Fantasy wargamers (nearly illiterate) interested solely in the costumes, the films and media gossip. And, of course, Scientologists looking for a sucker.

Our hypothetical SF con browser, trying to be open-minded, may assume that all of this is just peripheral trappings and the real meat of the con is in the panels. So he or she checks his or her schedule...

Here are some panel and programming titles taken from several real cons:

Where is Costuming Going?  
Live-Action Role-Playing Games  
Fanthistory Part N  
What is it About Fans and Cats?  
Dragons and Unicorns: Can They Be Crossbred?  
Interstellar Civilizations Without FTL  
Style: Is it Necessary?  
Will Space Colonies be Comfortable?  
Trivia Quiz  
Are Kirk and Spock Necessary for Star Trek's Success?  
Trivia Bowl  
Fan Wars: Great Fannish Fights and Hoaxes  
Trivia Contest  
The Economics of Conventions  
Fanzine Publishing as a Lifestyle  
Aliens and Their Weapons  
Appreciating the Art of Boris Vallejo  
Libertarians and the Future

Discouraging, isn't it? That's a pretty reasonable smattering. Go back and look to see how many of those subjects are wholly fanish concerns. Fanzine publishing, trivia panels (panels for exercising one-upmanship in science fiction book and movie minutiae), convention economics (I'd like to see someone investigate that subject objectively, someone like the IRS), have a suspicion that not as many cons and in the red as pretend to, fan history, fan costuming, fans and their fucking pets for god's sake, fanish intergalactics and fanish interest in national politics—usually conservative Libertarian.

Obviously, these are Wanker Fans, playing with themselves and their little elite world of neurotic wish-fulfillment fantasies and role-playing; pretending, in their insecurity, that the rest of the world is "Mundane," reducing all SF to the status of bad superhero comics; concerned like misplaced bureaucrats for the means and not the end, talking about themselves talking about themselves. Conventions have mostly always been like this, though I think the early ones enjoyed a certain joy in discovery, a joy missing from current cons. There was a pleasure in discovering so many people into what you were into. Maybe a fresher feel to the programming. Anything becomes hackneyed with time—but cons have become positively

mordant. They're corpses, and the media fans and the Wankers and the Scientologists are the maggots. They get duller every year. The Wanker Fans become more interested in their thing, and the serious SF people become more glaze-eyed and despairing.

I'm in favor of having fun. I'm in favor of humorous panels, parties, orgies (but use a condom), doing whatever you like. But we need substance too, and it's almost gone from conventions.

Or if there is substance, it's dry and cautious and unimaginative. "Computer Technology: Will It Change Our Lives Significantly?" Hey, no kidding. "Organ Transplants: The Moral Implications." Ooh, how about making it into a made-for-TV movie?

Now and then there's a panel with the yeasty potential for something intoxicating: "Alien Cultures and What They Tell Us About Our Own Psychology" ... "21st Century Global Politics" ... "Beyond Cyberpunk: The Next Step."

But if you attend these panels, you'll find yourself almost alone. Most everyone is at the "How Vulcans Have Sex" panel. At the substance-stoked panel, there'll be a half-dozen twitching obsessives in the audience, shrieking about Communism or how they know about alien cultures because they were picked up by flying saucers...and if you're lucky, there'll also be three sincerely interested, intelligent people. Our GTSF-oriented reader might make the acquaintance of this minority. More likely the low energy in the room and the mealy-mouthed caution of the panelists will drive the browser away, and out of the con.

The only real interest in cons is the parties, and in rendezvousing with old friends. That's why most of us still go.

It's not enough. Cons have so much potential. We could have the parties—and the intellectual stimulus.

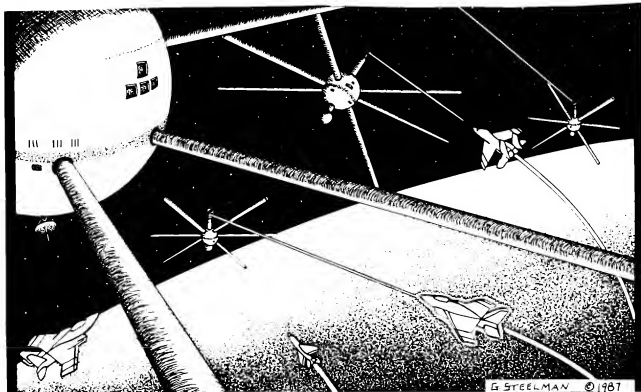
But we've got to organize them without conventional Genre Science Fiction fandom. Those of us interested in productive cons will have to steel ourselves to turning our backs on them. After all, we shouldn't spoil their fun. Why shouldn't they strut and play-act and endlessly discuss themselves? We all do such things on some level. So let them! But trying to strike a happy medium between their kind of programming and ours is useless. They're ballast on us and we on them. GTSF fans—liberate yourselves. Cease working beside the Wanker Fans and the media fans and the GSFers and the drinkers of beer with an "H." They're terminally elitist—so perhaps we will have to be defensively elitist, for there is no other way to save the ripe potential implicit in their conattering. Let's simply stop letting them dictate what the cons are going to be like for us.

That means A) invent alternate conventions, and attend them; B) boycott theirs; or, more practically, C) introduce blocks of alternative programming into ordinary cons, use them as a template to organize totally independent alternative cons. More on that at the end of this column.

There's a con in the Bay Area this year called Sercon, which has no costuming and is interested in serious discussion of SF. This is a step in the right direction; but I suspect the Sercon people are prone to Genre SF's tendency to rehash the same old points.

-----continued on page 16

# According to Hoyle



## GREGORY BENFORD

When one of the most prominent scientists in the world turned to writing strict genre science fiction, the realms of both literature and science took notice. It is difficult now to recapture the startled remarks of both reviewers and scientists when Fred Hoyle published *The Black Cloud* in 1957, apparently not noticing that he had linked science fiction and real, hard science in a way no one had before. Now, thirty years later, his influence is wide.

Many consider *The Black Cloud* to be Hoyle's best fiction, and indeed as his most enduring work. As *THE (LONDON) TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT* remarked, "What gives probability to the story is the author's command of a wide range of scientific reference... The reader follows diagrams and stumbles through equations and begins to feel quite a scientist himself by the end of the story."

Exactly. Hoyle later told me that his method of writing fiction was to begin by thinking the whole story over carefully, perhaps making some notes and doing calculations. Then he would clear a week or so from his busy personal schedule, sit down and begin writing as quickly as he could, holding the whole tale in his head. When he wrote conversations—for his books often have great slabs of talk, high-brow intellectual ping-pong among scientists—he would try to reproduce how he carried on discussions with the leading astronomers of his day.

All this was qualitatively different from the

science fiction which came before. Certainly scientists had been major characters, and indeed, ornate technical talk festooned even the early pulp magazines. But never before had science fiction convincingly conveyed the lively logic of scientists at work. Writers had pressed their noses against the glass, peering inward at the technicolor glow of science, but none had participated at the highest levels. *THE DAILY TELEGRAPH* rightly remarked that *The Black Cloud* would tell readers "more about the scientific mind than a dozen treatises."

Hoyle had followed C.P. Snow's earlier forays into the world of science and power. Both used minimal dramatic skills, leaning heavily on occasionally cumbersome authorial voice. (Chapter Three opens, "It is necessary now to describe the consternation that Kingsley's cablegram produced in Pasadena.") Both gave us yards of talk, deliberately avoiding any taint of melodrama. But Hoyle's crucial change was to introduce, without apology, a speculative premise. He had seen that an incisive way to show scientists at work lay in making them solve a problem which was new and important. This was clearly more interesting than recounting the history of discoveries in crystallography, as Snow had done in *The Search*.

What's more, Hoyle believed there was merit to his speculations. His preface flatly says, "After all, there is very little here that could not conceivably happen." To underline this, Hoyle did not set his story a comfortable

few decades ahead. He placed it smack in his own time, waving away the fact that this would date the story superficially within a few years. This minor loss was offset by the verisimilitude of using England as it was in 1956, warts and all. We don't mind that computers use "valves" (electronic tubes, replaced by transistors in the late 1950s) and are programmed by holes punched in paper tape. What matters is the excitement of watching people struggle with large problems.

Nor that these are fully rounded people. Hoyle devoted little space to "humanizing" his characters, perhaps because he has always felt that there are types of people whose thinking is more important than any other facet. Like many untutored authors, he ends up portraying himself. He seems to have realized this, and in his preface warily sidesteps identification of his characters with real people. But the central figure of *The Black Cloud* is clearly much like Hoyle.

Even before I met Hoyle in 1963, I wondered if this novel's Chris Kingsley was a stand-in for the author. The novel had affected me strongly, because for the first time it united my growing interest in science with the zest of speculation I enjoyed in science fiction. When I arrived at the University of California in La Jolla, to register for graduate study in physics, I was startled to see a notice announcing a seminar by Hoyle that very week. I arrived early, and saw a man of middling height who spoke with straight-forward assertion, his manner and accent quite different from the studied styles



of Oxford and Cambridge. His seminar was a brilliant argument in favor of a new cosmology, and he quickly covered the green writing boards with tensor equations. He was at his best in the give and take of questions afterward, when he attacked the conventional wisdom of the Big Bang cosmology. That was the clue. Physically Hoyle didn't resemble Kingsley, but there was that air: "I'm only really comfortable as an underdog," Kingsley remarks in the novel, and indeed Hoyle has played that role throughout his career.

His first major break with convention came with the Steady State theory, which imposes in one bold stroke the requirement that the universe look the same at all times. (This paralleled the condition invoked in already existing theories, that the universe look the same in all directions, from any point. That immediately means the universe must appear to be expanding no matter where you are. This imposes certain strong conditions on theory.) Demanding that the universe not change with time means that matter must be created at a steady rate, to force the expansion. The Steady State theory was a lovely idea, but the story of science is that of brutal murder of beautiful theories by ugly facts. The nasty fact that the universe had an earlier, hotter phase (producing the microwave hiss known as three-degree, cosmic background radiation) finally killed the Steady State model.

While he made major contributions to many fields, from stellar evolution to cosmology, Hoyle became best known for his more speculative ideas. He predicted maximum Earthly life could have begun from molecules delivered by infalling comets. He wrote two novels exploring the idea that communication between interstellar civilizations would proceed by sending instructions for building special computers. He fought a long rear-guard action in favor of the Steady State theory, often inventing ingenious ways to conjure up the microwave background

radiation and keep the essentials of the theory.

The Black Cloud sets forth perhaps his best known wild idea. It makes plausible the notion of a purely physical origin for life, with no necessity for biological processes. In principle this is possible, since life at its most general demands only a flow of energy through a system which can spontaneously organize itself into more complex forms. I suspect that Hoyle wanted to shake up his colleagues with this novel, rather than propose an idea which could be studied immediately. However, he has since published papers about the formation of complex chemical forms in interstellar clouds, and the possibility that life could arise there. The papers have been attacked, and Hoyle has replied with pointed and witty rejoinders.

All through his varied career he often seemed to enjoy playing the underdog, or taking up similar causes. When fellow Cambridge scientists Martin Ryle and Anthony Hewish won the Nobel Prize, principally for the discovery of pulsars, Hoyle strongly protested in the *TIMES* that Hewish's graduate student, Jocelyn Bell, had been wrongly ignored. She had in fact spotted the regular radio pulses which led to the discovery. Omitting her from the prize was a spectacular example of Establishment stupidity.

I occasionally talked with Hoyle during my own graduate career, and came to see his novels as expressions of a more general attitude toward Establishment science and power. As his Kingsley remarks, "Don't I keep telling everyone that our whole social system is archaic, with all the real knowledge at the bottom and a whole crowd of hobbledeys at the top?" This, too, paralleled C.P. Snow's famous Two Cultures speech in 1959, which pointed out that lack of integration between humanistic and scientific worldviews damaged society. Indeed, Hoyle went further than Snow. He felt that the scientifically trained are better suited to govern than arts-educated,

since technical studies are less tied to emotional questions, and thus such people could bring a certain coolness of judgment to hotly contested issues.

These views echo John W. Campbell, the editor who led the *Golden Age* of magazine science fiction. Indeed, Hoyle has led a life Campbell would have liked--original, speculative, scientist, "hard" science fiction author, maverick. We might think of Hoyle as the first person to do what so many science-fiction figures ached to do, all the while keeping his sardonic distance from the conventional wisdom.

I recall asking if Chris Kingsley's name hinted at Kingsley Amis, one of the Angry Young Men who were coming to prominence then (and also an early herald of science fiction as significant literature, in his *New Maps of Hell*, 1960). He answered that he could not recall, that details of his fiction faded quickly after the work was done. What has not faded is the importance of *The Black Cloud*, with its grand ideas cast in a plain, flat style. The novel's opening chapters often catch the characters in motion, traveling (as jet-set scientists do) to keep on top of a fast-breaking idea. Hoyle's single demand that science fiction not yield incessantly to melodrama, that it render with fidelity how scientists think and talk and struggle for power--these facets have persisted in science fiction. Though I had not returned to the novel since my first reading in 1958, I can see clearly that its influence stayed with me. I used Hoyle as a real figure in my novel *Timescape*, and mined my memories of his seminar style for fictional characters in it, too.

*The Black Cloud* uses a dual strategy--scrupulous attention to how scientists really are, balanced against a genuinely bizarre idea. This quiet little book brought major changes in how "hard" science fiction could be written, casting a pale gaze upon those whose gaudy starship captains and mad scientists of the past.

## SHIRLEY continued from page 14

Simply jettisoning trivia quizzes and costumes is not enough. We need more than seriousness--we need freshness! Which means fresh input.

We need to cut all ties with the old cons. I think serious--though not stodgy--cons should be organized without Genre SF Fan involvement, and advertised in places those into GTSF will see them. Not LOCUS. Non-SF publications of all kinds. Writer's magazines, art magazines (a lot of people in the various art undergrounds are also interested in the better SF, I find), the NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, say. NATIONAL LAMPOON. UTNE READER, WHOLE EARTH REVIEW, THE NATION... maybe take out ads in the back of relevant paperbacks... we'll think of something.

We'll use the organizing skills evolved for standard cons, but we'll slant the subject matter and style of the cons to maximum freshness. We'll invite people to speak who have relevant things to say, but no usual connection to SF. Cutting-edge scientists, Japanese industrialists, avant-garde poets and writers and film makers, relevant rock performers, relevant stand-up comics and

performance artists. We'll invite people who don't ordinarily concentrate on SF themes to submit short films or papers on futurological subjects. Great essayists. Political radicals and super-conservatives. We could put them on a panel together and ask them to try to work out an imaginary political system for the future using all both their principles, or at least let them compare visions of the future. We could invite writers like Margaret Atwood and Vonnegut and the Latin magic realist writers, people who write SF or fantastic stuff from the inside, from the viewpoint. We could submit the latest in experimental video and sculpture. We could involve the Subgeniuses, of course, and Bob Black can lecture on the "Abolition of Work" and Peter Lamborn Wilson on the "Abolition of Consensual Reality." And of course there will be serious programming about GTSF.

Just a suggestion or two. You see the direction. We devise it to appeal to GTSF people, and I believe, thousands of them will come out of the woodwork.

How it would actually work is really still up in the air. But we've sighted in on it, up there. And as a beginning, I'd like to hereby announce a contest.

The Alternative Convention Programming contest.

Readers, I want you to write in to me care of THRUST and give me lists of really imaginative and different, but relevant, ideas for convention programming. I want volatile but thought-out stuff. Trail-blazing stuff.

Each entry should have five suggestions. The best fifteen entries will be published in my column, and the very best will receive...

These fabulous prizes!

A copy of the Arbor House edition of *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, signed by the editor, Bruce Sterling. A copy of *Count Zero* signed by the author, William Gibson. A free subscription to THRUST. (I'll pay for it, Doug. In fact, I'll provide all these prizes myself.) And a genuine attempt by Yours Truly to talk some convention into using your programming (any cons out there volunteering ahead of time?) and crediting you in the program book!

Wow.

Big deal, huh? Well, it's the best I can do. And this is serious, not a joke. Contest and prizes are real. I need this stuff ASAP. Get to work!

And...Make It Scream!

# IMMORTALISM: "The Long-Range View"



## Marvin Kaye

Part Four: Untimeliness and Pity

When President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Friday, November 22, 1963, I was a reporter on the staff of the national newspaper, *GRIT*. During that terrible weekend of universal anguish and muffled drums, one of the editors showed me a quasi-poetic eulogy to the dead president delivered to our offices by one of our stringers. The tenor of the piece was that JFK's soul was now enshrined in our hearts with Washington and Lincoln and all other American heroes. Meanwhile, in the real world, the relentless eye of the television camera showed us the president's small son holding his mother's hand, stumbling on marble steps, perhaps only vaguely aware of why his father was no longer there to hug him.

Obviously, one's first reaction to an appalling tragedy such as the assassination of a president is and ought to be wholly emotional. There is a time for necessary grief. I underscore this point because I am about to speculate on the Nietzschean concepts of pity and untimeliness, but I do not wish to appear -- like that rural correspondent of 1963 -- to draw cheap consolations for those whose suffering cannot easily be assuaged. Tragedy and justice must not be ignored, yet they should also be viewed in historical perspective as part of a long-range ethical dialectic. This is a concept that activists either tend to ignore or distrust (or both).

I am emotionally unsuited to being an activist. I dislike newspapers and periodicals and evening news reports: They strike me as the paraphernalia of what Herman Hesse labeled the age of "the feuilletons" -- that is, our media-dominated culture of page-turners and TV screen gawkers who indiscriminately scarf down atrocity news and celebrity gossip at every meal. Granted that I am somewhat like Eugene Ionesco's protagonist Berenger, who refuses to be a miniceros because it is constitutionally impossible for him to manage the feat, so he may as well champion his inescapable otherness. Yet to be untimely means more than merely being out of phase with one's society.

In *The Gay Science*, Frederick Nietzsche wrote, "What is timely will pass away with the time, and untimeliness is the price of immortality." He meant more than mere bodily survival. Cryogenic interment and longevity research were not yet in existence, and had they been, Nietzsche may have viewed them with great dismay. His own doctrine of "Eternal Recurrence" -- in which every historical event, great or small, must occur over and over again throughout eternity -- initially terrified him.

Nietzsche considered untimeliness a vital philosophical choice. It meant to reevaluate ethical truisms and formulate a new moral order, even at the risk of isolating oneself from one's fellows.

Nietzsche perceived late 19th-century Germany as a compost heap of corrupted bourgeois morality and pugnacious ethnocentrism. (Images of stench and decay abound in his writings.) Cursed with tragic vision, the shy, ailing philosopher foresaw all too clearly the growth of the intense nationalism that eventually erupted into Nazism. He was an activist to the extent that he endured excruciating physical pain in order to combat what he perceived as ethical cancer by writing some of the most significant (and beautiful and moving) books in the history of Western thought. Nietzsche had no alternative but to be untimely. Only by fashioning a vision of a kinder world administered by "over-men" could he find respite from the toleranz of his own ailing society.

Incidentally, "over-man" is far preferable to the Shavian "superman." Nietzsche's ablest translator-biographer, Walter Kaufmann, employs "over-man" for "übermensch," partly because it is a more accurate rendering of the German term. (Simple visual inspection confirms this.) But more important is the fact that Nietzsche never meant by "übermensch" to imply a race of Teutonic bullies. His vigorous renunciation of Richard Wagner's chest-thumping myth-operas speaks eloquently to the point, and there are many eloquent passages in his books which state that those who misuse power are condemned to inflict suffering. Instead of testifying to the superiority of the oppressor, Nietzsche repeatedly insists that pugnacity indicates ethical weakness, that those who mistreat their fellows lack moral stamina. (Had he lived, the philosopher would surely have regarded Hitler as the ultimate under-man.)

The Nietzschean over-man is ethically superior. He upholds the noblest and most humane human values. He is the enemy of all that is criminal, cruel and mendacious.

Now Nietzsche is surely the least understood and most unfairly vilified of all modern philosophers. This is largely due to his Machiavellian sister, Elisabeth, who doctored significant portions of her brother's writings after he was incapable of stopping her. Yet Nietzsche is also misunderstood because of confusion over a central concept of his system of thought: that of pity. Time and again he insists on the uselessness of the emotion. The hasty reader may conclude that Nietzsche was therefore lacking in compassion.

Nietzsche's actual intent is twofold. First, he regards pity as a simplistic trick for dealing with those who suffer without truly comprehending the complexity of their plight. Second, he urges visionaries like himself not to waste time in patchwork remedies that do not deal with the intolerable conditions out of which specific tragedies arise. Inhumanity is so rife that one may pitch into endless battles against it without ever fighting those root evils from which the plague stems. Treating symptomatic evil is merely timely. What we must do is strive to create a world where people will universally regard inhumanity as unspeakably repugnant.

Such a notion is, of course, absurdly untimely. Who, therefore, is better to attempt it than the immortalist champion of a movement that is itself both contemporary and, paradoxically, premature?

Next issue: Epistle to the Hesseans □

# REVIEWS

## books, etc.



**THE JAGUAR HUNTER** by Lucius Shepard  
(Arkham House, Sauk City, WI 53583, 1987,  
404 pp., \$21.95) (ISBN 0-87054-154-4)  
Reviewed by Doug Fratz

Lucius Shepard burst into the science fiction field just a few short years ago, but has already attained the status of the field's most consistently brilliant short-fiction author. The *Jaguar Hunter* is Shepard's first collection, and will probably be the most important one to appear this year.

Virtually all of Shepard's fiction shares a few common traits: high emotional intensity; exotic third-world locale; a unique sense of magic; a strong sense for how things feel; an intensely poetic style. But the stories themselves range from supernatural horror stories to high fantasy to near-future hard SF.

This collection includes Shepard's 11 best stories, leaving out no more than a handful of works. All were published between 1984 and early 1986, and every one was among the best fiction in its category in the year it was published.

Some of the best Shepard stories are based in Central or South America. The title story, "The Jaguar Hunter," is a beautiful and magical fantasy story, as is "Black Coral." "The End of the World As We Know It" evolves from a superb character study to become an intensely mystical fantasy. "A Traveler's Tale" again uses the magical milieu of Central America (an island off Honduras) for an exquisite near-future hard SF tale of alien visitation. Local color and atmosphere play much less of a role in "Menegle"—one of the few Shepard stories which is primarily an

idea story.

Shepard has put his Central-American locale to possibly their best use best use in his near-future SF stories of Americans fighting in a gritty, high-tech jungle war. His first such story was "Salvador," an incredibly intense supernatural fantasy of wartime horror. His latest is "R & R," which just won a Nebula Award, and just may be the best story in the collection.

Exotic locale and local color also play a role in "The Night of White Bhairab," a supernatural horror story set in the Himalayas. "How The Wind Spoke at Madaket" gets its local color from New England, and is a typical Stephen King horror story, but written with a poetic sensitivity King lacks. "A Spanish Lesson" is another excellent SF story, with a contemporary Mediterranean setting. The final story in the collection differs from all other Shepard work to date, being a beautiful and unique high fantasy entitled "The Man Who Painted the Dragon Graule."

Lucius Shepard is at his best when writing in novella and novelette lengths. Although his first novel, *Green Eyes*, appeared in 1984 as part of the Ace Special line, and was critically well accepted, the book was lost in the shadows of Gibson and Robinson. It will be interesting to see whether his second novel, *Life During Wartime*, due out this year from Bantam, will be able to establish Shepard as a leading novelist as well.

The collection also includes a fine introduction by Michael Bishop, and brilliant illustrations by Jeffrey K. Potter. Arkham House is building a reputation for excellent short fiction collections by the field's finest stylists. Collections of the quality of *The Jaguar Hunter* are very rare. If you buy just one hardcover book this year, make it this one.

**TRILLION YEAR SPREE: THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION** by Brian Aldiss  
(Atheneum, 1986, 512 pp., \$19.95) (ISBN 0-689-11839-2)  
Reviewed by Eugene Lin

Among all that has been written about SF, Brian Aldiss' 1973 book, *Billions Year Spree*, was surely seminal. Aldiss predicted the rise of SF criticism, although little of it has been up to the standards of Aldiss' own book. *Billions Year Spree* is widely considered the best history of SF, with James Gunn's *Alternate Worlds* perhaps the only serious competition.

*Trillion Year Spree*, written with David Wingrove, is the long-awaited update to *Billions Year Spree*. The first part is basically *Billions Year Spree*: the second deals with post-Campbellian SF. All that made the original what it was is present in the revision: Writers like Lucien and Voltaire have prominent niches in SF history; modern SF rose from the gothic; *Frankenstein* is the first SF novel; and Hugo Gernsback is the worst disaster ever to hit the field. Indeed, Aldiss' convictions on these controversial positions are strengthened.

One criticism of *Billions Year Spree* was its neglect of the pulp tradition. This is one area where David Wingrove might have helped the most, but the book's discussion of the pulps is still out of proportion to the space it devotes to ultra-marginal SF writers like Kafka and SF's so-called ancestors. Another

criticism centers on Aldiss' hasty coverage of the post-war period, a fault now remedied. The new section is, however, comparatively tame; there is nothing that will provoke the response that Aldiss' attack on Gernsback did. Aldiss' views on contemporary SF are already well-known, so the strategically placed chapter "The Day of the Dumbkin," which is devoted to bashing the newstand and power (read American) fantasies that proliferate in trilogies and dekolagies today, is no surprise. Also to be expected are the later chapters, in which Aldiss bemoans the effect of success on Asimov and Heinlein and the sad lot of SF in Britain. The last two chapters are an admirable attempt at an overview of contemporary SF, and a significant break from the rest of the book. But I suspect that many of the writers discussed at some length in the final chapter will receive only passing mentions in future histories of SF.

A statement regarding the authors' attempts to be objective appears in Aldiss' introduction, but the new material in *Trillion Year Spree* falls far short of this goal. The American New Wave, Aldiss tells us, was all style and no substance, as is William Gibson. Yet "no higher praise can be given" for Starling's *Schlamatrix*. Aldiss' good friend, Harry Harrison, also gets some more praise. Lem is brushed off in a paragraph, Budrys in a sentence. Aldiss refrains from discussing his own work, thereby excluding from the history of SF one of the premier British SF writers. (Couldn't David Wingrove have written on Aldiss?) Aldiss and/or Wingrove interject opinions on almost all the writers; these opinions are usually not centrist and sometimes iconoclastic.

*Trillion Year Spree*, as a standard literary history, leaves much to be desired. This, in itself, is not a problem at all, but the book is in a position where it will be used as a standard literary history. The revision is a much more commercial book than its predecessor: It is illustrated, it has a striking cover, and Aldiss' urbane, witty and metaphorical prose makes the book very readable.

Yet if one has read the Gernsback pulps, Shelley, Ellison, Gibson, Lessing or a lot of the writers who fall under Aldiss' scrutiny (and consider the critical acumen), it is, January 1986, all the more excellent. After all, anyone with background in a particular field might find a "standard" history of that field neither enjoyable nor useful, and this book is both. In *Billions Year Spree*, Aldiss noted that "it may be that Dick will emerge as one of the significant writers of our day." In the revision, he follows with many more pages devoted to PKD, a unique genius. Aldiss is excellent on the "dinosaurs" of the field, on "lifestyle" SF, on Wolfe, Shepard and many other emergent writers. His skill in choosing passages illustrative of a writer's work is unerring—one may be able to recognize Gibson anytime just from reading the passage in this book.

*Alternate Worlds* is still a better introduction to the field, but no reference shelf is complete without *Trillion Year Spree*.

**THE JOURNAL OF NICHOLAS THE AMERICAN** by Leigh Kennedy (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986, 204 pp., \$16.95) (ISBN 0-87113-108-0)

Reviewed by Dean R. Lambe

A short, simple story. *Journal* carries the impact of Robert Silverberg's *Dying Inside*, and promises to be underappreciated, despite its recent Nebula Award nomination.

As the title suggests, we follow a few months, a transition from lonely spring to joyous summer, in the life of Nicholas Alexandrovich Dal. Kolya, as the proper Russian diminutive for friends and family would have it, carries his family curse from Petrograd, from Leningrad, from Denver to his scruffy student apartment in Boulder. And someone, some mysterious stranger, a psychiatrist from the East Coast, seeks that curse, that family secret. For Kolya, like his male relatives before him, is a tele-empath; he feels what others do, and strong emotion can drive him to seizures. Unable to share his life with another, to bear another physically close to him while sober, Kolya is astounded when Jack Berdo worms her way into his life and heart. Jack, however, harbors her own psychic pain, for her mother, Susanne, is dying of cancer. The thorns on the rose of love that blossoms between the two college students are blunted by Kolya's discovery of Susanne's emotional turmoil. And the snooping psychiatrist, Ben Miller, adds an anguished twist of his own, as his efforts to understand Kolya's genetic "gift" take on personal meaning.

One senses, perhaps because the spirit of great Russian literature is captured here, that happy endings do not portend—and that is indeed the case. A fine hand at dialogue, narrative, and tone has produced a memorable work. Do read this one.

## TALKING MAN A FANTASY NOVEL



**TERRY BISSON**

**TALKING MAN** by Terry Bisson (Arbor House, 1986, 192 pp., \$14.95) (ISBN 0-87795-813-0)

Reviewed by Howard Coleman

If you read science fiction with any expectations beyond numbing your brain for a couple of hours without resorting to costly chemicals, you undoubtedly have the secret desire for a work of fiction that will create the kind of sense of wonder usually reserved for children, mystics, astronauts and those touched by divine revelations.

And every so often you find it. Terry Bisson's *Talking Man* is an uncommon book. The *Talking Man* of the title is a wizard, or maybe a god, who has dreamed the world and, being as human as the people in his dreams, has fallen in love with his creation. He has a junkyard on a hillside in western Kentucky, where he lives in a trailer with his daughter Crystal.

Using only a little magic, *Talking Man* repairs the windshield of a robin-egg-blue '66

Mustang in the care of William Tilden Hendricks Williams, who finds himself taking an interest in Crystal. Then Dgene, who has no soul, finds *Talking Man*, for whom she has searched for a million years, and sets out to unmake reality. To stop her, *Talking Man* must reach the North Pole before Dgene. Crystal and Williams follow his trail, driving a red and white '62 Chrysler New Yorker.

Their journey commences in Bisson's beautifully realized Kentucky. It proceeds through vivid landscapes that recede farther and farther from here and now, until the only reality is that of Crystal and Williams, working and growing up together on a trip to the end of the world.

The book is marvelously written. There is a precision of description that is almost loving,

whether the subject is an old John Deere tractor (stalking in the sun "like an old dog scratching"), or the proper nurture of young tobacco plants, or the unforgettable sight of the three bridges across the Mississippi Canyon. You may find yourself admiring things which you never before found admirable (like, in my case, cars). You will certainly think differently about junkyards, of which Bisson is clearly a connoisseur.

You might also think differently about the potential of good SF/fantasy. Do yourself a favor and read this book.

**GLASS AND AMBER** by C. J. Cherryh (NESEA Press, Box G, MIT Branch P.O., Cambridge, MA 02139, 1987, 212 pp., \$15.00)

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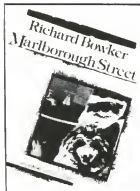
plus \$1 postage)  
Reviewed by Doug Fraitz

For a number of years now, the Boston SF club has been publishing a nice little series of small (paperback-sized) hardcover books, usually to honor the latest Boskone guest of honor. Recent NESFA Press books have featured Robert Bloch, Jack Vance, Gene Wolfe, Mack Reynolds, Gordon Dickson, Damon Knight, and Bob Shaw/Terry Carr (in an Ace-Double format). Most books feature a collection of short fiction and non-fiction pieces, tending to concentrate on hard-to-find material.

The latest NESFA Press collection honors C. J. Cherryh, with a collection published for this year's Boskone which includes 7 short stories and 5 non-fiction pieces. Virtually all of the non-fiction--most are short convention speeches--are of only passing interest. The fiction ranges from minor early stories to several excellent works, most notably "A Gift of Prophecy," an excellent hard SF story which has apparently never before seen print in English. (It was previously published in Dutch--there must be an interesting story behind that.) Another stand-out is "Willow," a well-written fantasy which shows Cherryh's clear improvement in writing style over earlier work.

Cherryh's imaginative and carefully crafted settings continue to bring Cherryh a wide following. Cherryh's main faults fall in an area where most less talented SF writers have little trouble: She has great difficulty writing smooth-reading, clear and concise prose, a problem greatly exacerbated by eccentric punctuation. Far too often when reading Cherryh's fiction, one must stop and reread sentences or even full paragraphs to correct misunderstandings.

These NESFA Press books are nice little collector's items. Fans of Cherryh's work will not be disappointed with this latest volume.



**MARLBOROUGH STREET by Richard Bowker** (Doubleday, 1987, 182 pp., \$12.95)  
(ISBN 0-385-19753-5)  
Reviewed by Mark J. McGarry

Massachusetts author Richard Bowker's third novel is by no means spectacular, but it should not be dismissed. In its quiet way, it is a thoroughly successful work.

The protagonist is an unlikely one: Alan Simpson, a somewhat reclusive eccentric who makes a meager living as a secretary to a bigger eccentric, a rich hermit writing a book about how to get along with people. Matter of factly, Bowker shows us that Simpson has a psychic gift for finding missing persons, one reliable enough to have brought him into a working relationship with a police detective.

As *Marlborough Street* opens, Simpson uses his gift to find the kidnapped son of Boston's mayor, but his power also leads him to the reluctant kidnapper--literally, the woman of his dreams. Bowker leads us smoothly through Simpson's infatuation with, then love, for Julia Walker, and through her to Seth, the twisted psychic who forces his minions to kidnap and murder the children of the powerful.

The novel's strength is in the matter-of-fact manner in which Bowker presents Simpson's gift. The conflict with Seth, though well done, is secondary to the exploration of Simpson's character, and how his gift leads him first to love, then to battle with Seth.

The novel's flaw--a forgivable one--is that Bowker gives us little of Simpson's history and less of Seth's. Simpson is an odd enough human being that one is eager to learn how he came to become an idiosyncratic hermit, and Seth is chilling enough that we wonder at his origins, too. We can infer that their powers set them apart from their fellow man, but both would be more sympathetic characters if we did not have to guess.

Except for a stumbling chapter, when Simpson finds himself working in a West Coast nursing home and the novel's forward momentum stops dead, *Marlborough Street* proceeds evenly to a satisfying denouement.

Bowker's novel is not a heavyweight, but it is an able treatment of one of science fiction's oldest themes, the ordinary man with extraordinary powers.



**SEA OF GLASS by Barry B. Longyear** (St. Martin's Press, 1987, 375 pp., \$18.95) (ISBN 0-312-00780-9)  
Reviewed by Dean R. Lambe

For those of us whose joints creak as we head out for a long pass, this bullet from an earlier age packs a real wallop. Flash back a score of years or so, when Paul Erlich's *The Population Bomb* raised political hackles, when John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* reached our smaller audience with the same message, and you have the game Longyear is playing one more time. Nostalgia is hardly the point; too few were listening the first time: the human race is going to fuck itself to death.

Never one for weighty metaphysics or whiz-bang super science, Longyear gives us another fine character study, a mixture of Conrad and Voltaire, a microcosm of the horror in the best of all possible worlds, and one man's struggle in an overpopulated 21st Century. We're not likely to forget Thomas Windom any time soon, for Thomas is an Outcast, an illegal child. Once discovered, his parents are immediately executed on TV and 8-year-old Windom is whisked off to "Redshift" status in a forced-labor camp. For years, the cruel guards, the cops, and other authority-figure "Blackshits" beat him into tortured manhood. Few of the friends he makes along the way survive; even fewer escape the camp with him. And, though

# Controversy

## IN REVIEW

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EDITED AND PUBLISHED BY RICHARD E. GEIS

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seemingly free of the stigma of red clothing. Windom soon discovers that his New England, even his every move, still answers to distant manipulation from MAC III, the social projection computer that predicts ultimate death for half of humanity in a few years.

In short, this novel almost overcomes my aversion to pretentious present-tense narrative, and to the lack of originality in telling a story through references to movie plots. It's good, it's important, and it should be read.



**UNIVERSE 16**, Edited by Terry Carr (Doubleday, 1986, 181 pp., \$12.95) (ISBN 0-385-22389-2)  
Reviewed by Doug Fratz

For more than a decade and a half, Terry Carr and his *Universe* series has been setting

the standards for original short fiction anthologies in the SF field, maintaining a position on the cutting edge of SF writing.

*Universe 17* continues the grand tradition. Carr chose to open the book with a pleasant surprise by little-known author Ronald Anthony Cross: "Hotel Mind Slaves" is a starkly original setting in search of a story; if it would have found one, you would have seen this story on the awards ballots this year. It is followed by "At the Flood" by Rick Shelley, an intensely believable story set in a constantly flooding near-future America. "The Idea Trap" by George Zebrowski is a bizarre, surreal fantasy that almost makes it to becoming hard SF; this may not be a fully successful story, but it's definitely on the cutting edge. Gary Konas' "What Genius" shows that he may be a writer to watch. "Was That House There Yesterday?" by Robert Thurston is a haunting contemporary fantasy, a departure for Thurston. "The Legend of the Seven Who Found the True Egg of Lightning" by Ian Watson is a myth told from the viewpoint of alien aborigines—once again, definitely cutting edge. Robert Reed does a rather good job on "Treading in the Afterglow," considering that it's about a bored immortal man who gets his kicks by spending a century digging a tunnel with his bare hands through an asteroid to get to a beautiful woman. "Dress Rehearsal" by Martha Soukup is an impressive debut, and clearly marks her as a writer to watch. The final story is "Voyage South From Thousand Willows" by Lucius Shepard. (Was it really

only four years ago that Shepard made his debut in *Universe 13*?) This is another in Shepard's series of stories featuring an American protagonist in a Caribbean setting—in this case, a down-and-out poet brought in by the military at the request of a dying alien to translate and record the alien's poetry. Lucius Shepard always writes intense and original stories.

With Terry Carr's tragic death in April of this year, the *Universe* series will undoubtedly be coming to an end. I believe that *Universe 17* was completed and will be published later this year. And there it ends. The science fiction field has lost a great editor, and without *Universe*, SF's cutting edge will be a little less sharply defined.

**THE UNICORN QUEST** by John Lee (Tor Books, 1986, 381 pp., \$2.95) (ISBN 0-812-54400-5)

by David F. Hamilton

The *Unicorn Quest* is John Lee's first novel, but it is an engaging, literate, and very well-written tale, an epic saga in the grand tradition of fantasy fiction. Lee's mastery of the language is evident in almost every passage, he makes precise word choices, and creates highly explicit visual images.

The novel tells the story of apprentice mage Jarrod Courtak of the Kingdom of Strand, and Marianna of Gwynryth. The story begins with a rousing opening sequence in which the two powerful Arch-mages of the

## NONFICTION SF BOOKS OF NOTE IN 1986

by Doug Fratz

### HISTORIES AND ESSAY COLLECTIONS

**TRILLION YEAR SPREE: A HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION** by Brian W. Aldiss (Atheneum, 511 pp., \$24.95) With the help of David Wingrove, Aldiss has updated his highly opinionated 1973 history of SF, *Billion Year Spree*. Clearly the most important nonfiction book published in the field in 1986.

**AN EDGE IN MY VOICE** by Harlan Ellison (Doherty, 548 pp., \$9.95) Another collection of Ellison essays, far larger than 1984's *Sleepless Nights in the Proustean Bed*. Harlan Ellison never fails to be interesting writing on any subject.

**HARD SCIENCE FICTION**, edited by George E. Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin (Southern Illinois University Press, 284 pp., \$21.95) A collection of sixteen essays on hard SF, including three by Robert L. Forward, David Brin and Gregory Benford. Easily the best of the academic volumes of 1986.

**EROTIC UNIVERSE: SEXUALITY AND FANTASTIC LITERATURE**, edited by Donald Palumbo (Greenwood Press, 305 pp., \$35.00) **EROS IN THE MIND'S EYE: SEXUALITY AND THE FANTASTIC IN ART AND FILM**, edited by Donald Palumbo (Greenwood Press, 290 pp., \$35.00) How can two books on this topic be so uninteresting?

### REFERENCE BOOKS

**CRITICAL TERMS FOR SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY** by Gary K. Wolfe (Greenwood Press, 162 pp., \$35.00) A bit more interesting than it sounds. Academic critic Wolfe has compiled definitional essays on what he considers key terms in SF criticism; one third are uselessly academic, and another third have definitions which add little of interest to veterans in the field, but the remaining essays provide some interesting history of SF terminology. Unfortunately, the high price makes the volume prohibitive for most fans.

**SCIENCE FICTION MASTER INDEX OF NAMES**, compiled by Keith L. Juste (McFarland, 300 pp., \$39.95) A combined name index of more than 130 SF reference books. For serious researchers only. **SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY SERIES AND SEQUELS (VOLUME 1: BOOKS)** by Tim Cottrill, Martin H. Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh (Garland, 398 pp., \$35.00) A bibliography by author giving title, date and publisher of each book in a given series. This is another volume which is unfortunately too expensive for fans.

### VOLUMES ON SINGLE AUTHORS

**ONLY APPARENTLY REAL: THE WORLD OF PHILIP K. DICK** by Paul Williams (Arbor House, 184 pp., \$7.95) An intimate and insightful look at Dick, comprised largely of a 1974 interview. Must-reading for all those who appreciated Philip Dick's quirky genius. **90 MINUTES WITH PHILIP K. DICK** (Philip K. Dick Society Newsletter #9/10, January 1986, available to PKDS members only, dues

\$6.00 per year) First side of cassette tape is a conversation between Dick and Paul Williams in 1974, and the other side is Dick alone taping notes for a novel. Fascinating. **ROGER ZELAZNY** by Theodore Krulik (Ungar, 178 pp., \$15.95) A highly academic but apparently well-done volume on Zelazny. Recommended for serious Zelazny fans and scholars.

**A RICHARD WILSON CHECKLIST, compiled by Chris Drumm/ADVENTURES IN THE SPACE TRADE** by Richard Wilson (Chris Drumm, 40 pp., \$2.00) Bibliography and personal memoir; a well deserved tribute to one of SF's great minor authors.

### ART BOOKS

**CHROMA: THE ART OF ALEX SCHOMBERG** by Jon Gustafson (Father Tree Press, 108 pp., \$12.95) A full color production chronicling more than fifty years of the marvelous SF and comic book art of Schomberg, mostly in full color, and at a reasonable price. Highly recommended.

### ON SF & FANTASY FILMS

**KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES! VOLUME 2, 1958-1962** by Bill Warren (McFarland, 837 pp., \$39.95) The second volume of the definitive review of SF films from 1950 to 1962. Highly recommended for buffs of SF films of that period.

**SCREENING SPACE: THE AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION FILM** by Vivian Sobchack (Ungar, 345 pp., \$14.95) The first book on SF films by a certified academic that I've seen, and it looks interesting. Movie fans may find this more serious approach to SF films refreshing.

Strand conjure up a frightening vision of the future in which the Strand is decimated by a brutal, mechanized enemy. At a war council later that day, the princess Naxania goes into a trance and speaks of a unicorn being led by a young man to save the Strand. The council decides to send Jarrod and Marianna on a quest to find the mythical beast, he being chosen for his magical talents, and she for her virginity.

The story then follows Jarrod and Marianna on their quest through the mountains of Songuard, to the Anvil of Creation, past a herd of guardian cloudsteeds to the Realm of the Dead, and finally to the Valley of the Unicorns. Along the way we are treated to the maturation of Jarrod from a shy, immature apprentice to the Arch-mage of Paladine, ready to be the keeper of the flame for the next generation.

**The Unicorn Quest** is an auspicious debut novel. If John Lee is able to maintain this level of quality in future books, his future indeed looks bright.



**IN THE FIELD OF FIRE**, edited by Jeanne Van Buren Dann and Jack Dann (Tor, 1987, 416 pp., \$8.95) (ISBN 0-312-93008-9)  
Reviewed by Andrew M. Andrews

"The Vietnam War was so psychologically cyclical and horrific in its effect on individuals that perhaps the dark personal 'truth' of their experience can best be reflected through the devices of metaphor and fantasy," according to the editors in the introduction to **In The Field of Fire**. "Science fiction and fantasy specialize in the creation of worlds and dreams. We think that these dreams, written by the best in these genres, bring another level of meaning and truth to the war that we have all—in our own ways—experienced."

These are the afterimages, the flopsam and jetsam of horrors experienced, needing dissolution in the world of fiction to help us all cope with the war that should never have been. It may work for some people as therapy; the therapeutic values of dreams, as the editors write: "transform the terrifying chaos of war into meaning."

There is so much at work here, more words do not do the volume justice. **In The Field of Fire** is greater than the sum of its parts, even greater than what it tries to encompass. The anthology is at once therapy, entertainment, and relief.

There is the crying and bitter testament to the Washington, DC Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, in Kim Stanley Robinson's "The Memorial." The encompassing need to know, to find the reasons for the war, if any, in Lucius Shepard's "Delta Sly Honey" and "Shades." Craig Strete's "The Game of Cat and Eagle" reaches for the answers to the same questions: Why the war? Were we meant to win it? What if the war was literally brought home, as in Kate Wilhelm's "The Village"? Dave Smeds' "Goats" and Gardner Dozois' "A Dream at Noonday" look at the effects of the war on men's souls. And there is poetry, in Joe Haldeman's riveting "DX."

Many of the contributors took no part in fighting the war, yet they have reached beyond the boundaries of ignorance and told their stories, which are our stories, and memories. The agonies—to prevent them from happening again—must live on.



**ASH WEDNESDAY** by Chet Williamson (Tor, 1987, 372 pp., \$16.95) (ISBN 0-312-93002-X)  
Reviewed by Mark J. McGarry

Chet Williamson's latest work is part of an excellent horror novel, but only part. As is the case with most successful horror, the situation in *Ash Wednesday* can be summed up in a sentence: One day in Merridale, Pennsylvania, the apparitions of all the town's dead appear, looking just as they did at their moment of death.

The glowing blue phantoms do not moan or rattle chains, but haunt Merridale's residents in more subtle ways, resurrecting memories of a murder or rekindling guilt over a traffic accident that killed a busload of children.

Williamson does a good job of painting a small town's reaction to the impossible, but by the end has not gone far beyond that. *Ash Wednesday* offers a half-hearted explanation of why Merridale is singled out for this visitation. There is a semblance of a plot in the confrontation brewing in between the father of a child killed in the school bus crash and the guilt-racked bus driver, who also lost his child in the accident.

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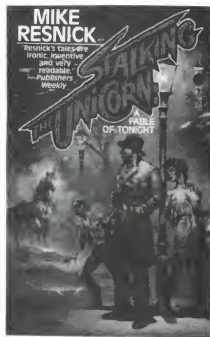
**The John W. Campbell Letters**  
Volume 1



Volume 1



But these are only nods in the direction of plot and theme. Like the apparitions, *Ash Wednesday* is haunting, but motionless and obscure. Williamson sets up a horrific situation, but neglects to build a story around it.



**STALKING THE UNICORN** by Mike Resnick (TOR, 1987, 314 pp., \$3.50) (ISBN 0-812-55114-1)  
Reviewed by Dean R. Lambe

Some gold mines play out almost as soon as they are discovered, and the fantasy set in a reasonably contemporary Manhattan seems a vein in search of new glitter—until Resnick shakes a pick at it, that is.

John Justin Mallory, a private eye facing a New Year's Eve as flat as his bank balance, steps over the rainbow into the not-quite Uptown of a fast-talking elf. Murgensturn (um! mlautes) was guarding the unicorn (Larkspur, you see, but Larkspur and his magic ruby that allows travel across the dimensions was stolen by Flypaper Gillespie, the nasty leprechaun. This Irish imp, in turn, has double-crossed the demon Grundy, who will have Mallory for breakfast, if the unicorn's ruby isn't delivered by dawn. Very rapidly, the detective's "I'll take Manhattan" song and dance comes to include a cat's lass, Winnie the aging White Huntress, and Echippus, a race horse with a real inferiority complex. Like all New Yorkers, Mallory would just as soon catch a cab and forget the whole thing, were it not for the fact that all cabs are elephants, and...well, you get the idea, the reader's on a funhouse tour here. Resnick being the writer he is, rapid jabs at fantasy's chin, as well as healthy punches to the Mickey Spillane mystique and the game of chess, are not without sharp lefts to the breadbasket of the human condition.

If fault there is in this puckish romp through a body with more than one appendix, it's a denouement far more seriously wrought than we deserve.

**THE YEAR'S BEST HORROR STORIES, SERIES XIV**, ed. by Karl Edward Wagner (DAW, 1986, 291 pp., \$3.50) (ISBN 0-86877-156-0)  
— Andrew M. Andrews

As editor of *The Year's Best Horror Stories, Series XIV*, Karl Edward Wagner admits his dislike for trendiness. He doesn't include many "name" writers in Year's Best merely because they are popular. His primary concern is the fiction. Wagner gathers his own representative best from every published source, including small and low-print presses.

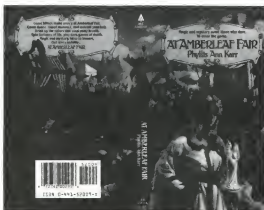
Readers should keep in mind that one editor's year's best does not always represent the best there is, nor can it match another editor's. But for Wagner, who has an abiding, innate love of the traditional horror tale, this volume speaks well. (Wagner himself is a horror writer in good standing.)

This is a robust, healthy sampling, a courageous attempt to gather and sift out the best from the rest, a treat for any fireside. Some stories stand out: "Dead Week," by Leonard Carpenter (what do you remember during the finals week at college?); "Bunny Didn't Tell Us," by David J. Schow (about a limousine gravesite—humor as dark as it can be); and "John's Return to Liverpool," as sweet and arresting and implicit as it sounds, mellow the collection. But there is more:

A boy who sees his family disappear, one by one, in "Dwindling," by David Silva. A mysterious woman, a ghost, sighted in Stonehenge, in "Penny Daye," by Charles L.

Grant. A whaler, lost in the Pacific off the coast of South America, discovered, only to have his horror rise from the ashes, in "Dead Men's Fingers," by Philip C. Heath.

Wagner has taken chances with unknown talent, introducing material from, as they say, far away places, unknown spaces. But the sampling attests to his editorship, his research and his concern.



**AT AMBERLEAF FAIR** by Phyllis Ann Karr (Ace Books, 1986, 166 pp., \$2.95)  
Reviewed by Ron Hamblen

On the surface, this is a who-done-it mystery with a fantasy backdrop. At the

## AUDIO SF&F REVIEWS by David F. Hamilton

The single most important set of cassette tapes released thus far in the rapidly growing field of audio SF presentations is *Read/SF*, a four cassette series dedicated to the fight against illiteracy in America. *Read/SF* is the brain child of the late Mike Hodel, former host of the California-based SF radio show, Hour 25.

*Read/SF*, available for \$25 (plus \$1.50 postage and handling) for all four cassettes, would be well worth the price even if the proceeds were not going to fight illiteracy; the fact that they are is an added bonus which makes the package indispensable. To order, write to *Read/SF*, P.O. Box 1161, Culver City, CA 90232.

Among the outstanding selections included in this set are readings by Ray Bradbury, Harlan Ellison, Norman Spinrad, Greg Bear, David Gerrold, William P. Wu, Arthur Byron Cover and Dennis Eichen. Some of these readings are particularly notable, as they are not available anywhere else.

Ray Bradbury's "Bright Phoenix" is interesting, because it is the short story which later became the basis for the novel *Fahrenheit 451*. This story alone would make the collection worth having.

"Laugh Track" by Harlan Ellison is another outstanding selection. Ellison is the consummate reader in the field today. Listening to him is like listening to a well-done radio play. Harlan "becomes" the characters in his stories and adds a whole new dimension to one's enjoyment of the work. He has even been nominated for a Grammy (for his reading of the story "Jeffery is Five"). "Laugh Track" is an excellent story, made

even better by Harlan's presentation. The story originally appeared in the now-defunct *WEIRD TALES*, and has just recently been reprinted in *ASIMOV'S*. Its inclusion here makes this collection all the more desirable, because this story is not available through Harlan's own club, The Harlan Ellison Record Collection.

Several other selections are also exceptional. Norman Spinrad's "Brain Salad" is a comic tour-de-force and a stylistic delight. Any of you inspiring writers out there will find this story a must. It concerns a famous writer who finds himself blocked, and decides to have a brain transplant from a young science-fiction writer. The story is hilariously told from the viewpoints of both the donor and the recipient, both before and after the exchange.

Greg Bear's "Tangents" is an exciting story about a 10-year-old boy who can "see" in four dimensions, and what would happen if a four-dimensional creature passed through our three-dimensional space.

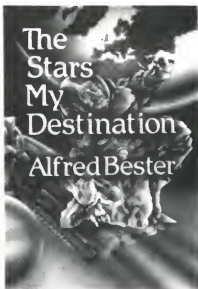
The one area where this collection falls a little short is when it gets away from the authors reading their stories and ventures into poetry or song. While most of the poems and songs included here provide pleasant diversion, there are none that are memorable, and they pale in comparison to the stories.

Given the fact that most of these stories were recorded live during their radio broadcast (the one exception being Bradbury's "Bright Phoenix," which had been taped previously), the recording quality and production values are excellent throughout.

All in all, *Read/SF* is an outstanding collection, and well worth the price. If you are at all interested in starting a science-fiction audio library, this would be a good place to start.

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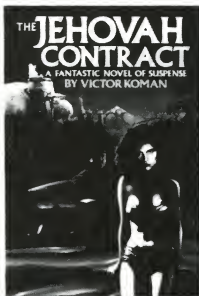


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East's annual Fair both Torin the toymaker and Valdart the adventurer ask to wed Sharay, who chooses the adventurer. When something happens to Valdart's wedding gift for Sharay, Torin, trained in magic, is accused of using that skill to get revenge. It is learned that Torin's brother, a highly skilled magician, may have a disease of hubris known as the "Choking Glory." Might Torin also have a lack of self-control? Did that inspire a jealous act?

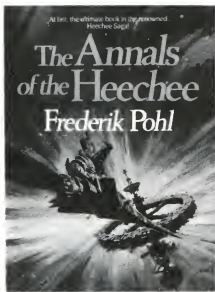
The story contains many references to a past that is recognizable human, but the humans in the story are subtly different from what we know. For example, applause is given with song rather than hands clapping in rhythm.

The use of magic is confined to those small entertainments which are the purview of a fair.

The characters are portrayed as common people who happen to live in a world which allows magic, who are trying to cope with the vagaries of daily existence rather than grand designs or momentous events. At Amberleaf Fair is a story of magic made common by the plot but raised above the common by the art of Karr's storytelling. The tension which underlies the story does not come from bringing a criminal to justice, but as a direct result of containing magic within the strong-willed jar of normalcy.

The people at Amberleaf Fair control themselves as they control their magic. The story culminates with a display of light-show magic that is likened to old-time fireworks, and it is clear that they have no memory of people being maimed or killed by fireworks or other uses of gunpowder. Their magic is an instrument of entertainment, not of power over other human beings. These are not humans as we know them today. Are they humans as we would like other to be? As we ourselves wish to be?

At Amberleaf Fair does not follow a well-trodden path. Take your time and enjoy the fair—it is nothing like those we know today.



THE ANNALS OF THE HEECHEE by Frederik Pohl (Del Rey, 1987, 338 pp., \$16.95) (ISBN 0-345-32565-6)  
Reviewed by Dean R. Lambie.

What makes Robin Broadhead run? Through four volumes now, beginning with

the multi-award-winner, Gateway, Pohl has given us a character in search of his navel, a Broadhead who swallows his own petty neuroses that alien races and the collapse of the universe takes second fiddle. It's the hell of a way to tell a tale of vast cosmology—through fixation in inner space so dull that even machine-intelligence shrink programs switch off.

Despite the overly cute opening of Annals, and the overlong sections on childish things, both Heechee and human, there's more in Broadhead's madness, and a final story to tell. Begging questions from the earlier novels, like why the Heechee disappeared into the black hole at the center of the galaxy, who the other semi-sentient species of the galaxy are, why that funny singularity, the kugelblitz, exists on the edge of the Milky Way, and how good sex is for machine-stored personalities—all this and more is laid before the patient reader. Unfortunately, a "vastened" person who now runs on millamps to support his database storage just doesn't have the heart-stopping drama of a "meat" person, no matter how many present wives, former lovers, ancient enemies and current kidnappers impinge on that database. Although some of the very best mind-broadening science writing threads through the middle of this novel, all too often I kept running onto images from the movie Tron, and my disbelief suspenders snapped. For all the cosmic scope, the ending is rather "eh, why not?"—a disappointment akin to a revelation that the famous Gateway asteroid is now a retirement home.

Still, in the hands of a master like Pohl, ideas and aliens can't help but entertain and stimulate. A blasé Heechee novel is two stars above most of the drek, and you really should read this end of an era.

DEATH IS A LONELY BUSINESS by Ray Bradbury (Bantam, 1987, 218 pp., \$3.95) (ISBN 0-553-26447-9)  
Reviewed by Andrew M. Andrews

Was Ray Bradbury responding to pressure from a) his publisher, b) his fans, c) his critics, or d) all of the above?

"D" seems most likely. After all, it had been 23 years since his last novel. Bradbury, a consummate short story writer, does better, even these days, in the short form. Poetry and short stories have been his forte for those 23 years.

Death is a Lonely Business is a detective novel; it has the parcel and glow of his early novel, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, a little of his short story, "The Ferris Wheel", and perhaps a bit of MacDonald, Hammett, and Chandler. And we see a lot of the Bradburian archetypal cinema and traveling circus show.

Out of the potpourri comes something that is irked out, that sarges from the typewriter a bit curdled, like a magician using electronics to perform old tricks. The material is aged; but even though it brings us back to the '40's, even though we should be basking in some warm hotchpot of reminiscence, even though the work as a whole is an authentic fever therapy, to rid Bradbury of a writer's block so thick it would make the wall of China look like a garden hedge—out of all this, due to Bradbury's style and love of language alone, it works.

Barely.

The story is about a would-be author (no doubt, Bradbury himself), along the road to million-plus paperback sales, who discovers a dead body in a vacant lion's cage, about an old amusement pier and a ramshackle theater with "Goodbye" on the faded marquee, and about how this young writer convinces the police that something is rotten in the dying town.

How does it work? This is a novel of poetry, pururbed poetic prose drama. Reading it is like picking up an old forgotten black and white film classic and viewing it for the first time, untainted by time, unmarred by the passage of a great author's writer's block. Bradbury, even in the smallest of places where he may still go wrong, is still a master.



CUTTING EDGE, edited by Dennis Etchison (Doubleday, 1986, 290 pp., \$16.95) (ISBN 0-385-23430-9)  
— Andrew M. Andrews

In the words of Kenneth Fatchen, "It may be a long time till morning, but there's no law against talking in the dark."

Of course, it all depends on what you have to say.

Cutting Edge is an attempted homage to the writers on the forefront, the "cutting edge" of horror fiction today. The stories in this volume are specially written for it, and are supposed to provide evidence of a "bold new age" of dark fantasy, according to the cover flap.

How many "bold new ages" can you remember being heralded? And how many were real? But this anthology must be judged on its own merits, without regard to the hype, as a book of modern horror fiction.

Unfortunately, this volume contains tired old stories about haunted houses, offbeat characters possessed of strange motivations and behaviors, inhumane cruelties, untoward despair. Most of these tales are more screams than stories, more horrible in style than in substance. There are also awkward attempts at originality in many of these stories which simply fail to work.

What is left when the smoke clears are a few gems: "The Monster" by Joe Haldeman, "Out There" by Charles L. Grant, "Laplace" by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, and "Reaper" by Robert Bloch. Whitley Streiber's "Pain" is also of interest, as a story which portrays human suffering and oppression as a queerly healing, almost erotic force.

Most of these stories feel like slush pile rejections, dredged back up and cleaned off for another go at it. Only a few examples rise from the ashes.

-----continued on page 30

# THRUST BACK ISSUES

**Issue 5 (Spring 1974).** Roger Zelazny interviews Frederik Pohl; GOH speech by Fred Pohl; fiction by Chris Lampton and Dave Bischoff; Steve Goldstein on Michael Moorcock; book reviews.

**Issue 8 (Spring 1977).** Interview with Ted White; Ted White on SF art; Doug Fratz on SF comics; David Bischoff on "Sense of Wonder"; SF on comic strips by Matt Swarth; Chris Lampton on the SF ghetto; book reviews.

**Issue 9 (Fall 1977).** Interview with Norman Spinrad; "Why I Am Not Announcing That I Am Leaving SF" by Norman Spinrad; Ted White on HEAVY METAL; Chris Lampton on breaking out of the SF ghetto; "Harlan, Come Home" by Charles Sheffield; Darrell Schweitzer, Ted White and Doug Fratz on Star Wars; comic strips by Stiles and Steffan; David Bischoff on SF and fandom; book reviews.

**Issue 10 (Spring 1978).** "On The Future" by Isaac Asimov; interviews with agents Kirby McCauley and Henry Morrison; "The Easiest Way to Become a Great SF Writer" by Charles Sheffield; comic strip by Derek Carter; Ted White on artistic creativity; David Bischoff on why he writes SF; Lou Stathis on being a reader for Dell Books; Steve Miller on SF story themes; book reviews.

**Issue 11 (Fall 1978).** Interviews with Theodore Sturgeon, Joe Haldeman and C.J. Cherryh; Ted White on SF music; Charles Sheffield on the science in SF; David Bischoff on the need for outside influences on SF; John Shirley on winning SF awards; Lou Stathis on SF writing workshops; book reviews.

**Issue 12 (Summer 1979).** Interviews with Fred Saberhagen and Octavia Butler; Ted White on animated movies; Charles Sheffield on the SF ghetto; David Bischoff on the NYC SF scene; Michael Bishop on the Gnomes book; John Shirley on paperback SF cover art; "The Making of Amazons" by Jessica Salmonson; Chris Lampton on the rising popularity of SF; Dan Steffen on SF&F art books; book reviews.

**Issue 13 (Fall 1979).** Interviews with David Gerrold and Alexei Panshin; Marion Zimmer Bradley on rape in SF; Ted White on SF writing; a satirical look at SF criticism by Michael Bishop; Charles Sheffield on the virtues of amateurism and professionalism; John Shirley on SF conventions; Dan Steffen on SF art; David Nalle on SF&F games; Steve Brown on the Campbell Awards; book reviews.

**Issue 14 (Winter 1980).** Interview with J.G. Ballard; Barry Malzberg on retiring from SF writing; Ted White on being editor of HEAVY METAL; Michael Bishop on the humor of book burles; Charles Sheffield on SF writing; David Bischoff on the trauma and catharsis of selling one's old SF books; John Shirley with an alternative SF convention; book reviews.

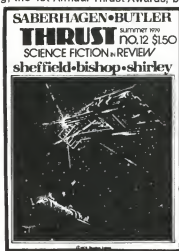
**Issue 15 (Summer 1980).** "SF Retrospective: 1979" by Gardner Dozois; interview with Frank Kelly Freas; Michael Bishop on Dozois, Elgin, Utley and Watson; George Alec Effinger on SF writing; Charles Sheffield on SF criticism and reviewing; Dan Steffen on SF art; Ted White on SF prozines; David Nalle on SF&F games; book reviews.

**Issue 16 (Fall 1980).** Interview with Joan D. Vinge; Michael Bishop on Gene Wolfe; Ted White on Lovecraft's influence on fantasy; David Bischoff on Doctor Who; John Shirley on bad SF in magazines; Mark J. McGarry on being a new SF writer; Jessica Amanda Salmonson on going from fandom to prodrom; David Nalle on SF&F games; book and movie reviews.

**Issue 17 (Summer 1981).** Interview with Raymond Gallun; Michael Bishop on the SF of Ray Bradbury; Charles Sheffield on dealing with literary agents; George Alec Effinger on the need for outside influences on SF fandom; Lou Stathis on being an editorial assistant at Dell Books; book and movie reviews.

**Issue 18 (Winter/Spring 1982).** Interviews with Gregory Benford and Somtow Sucharitkul; D.G. Compton on his life as an SF author; Charles Sheffield on Gor; Rich Brown criticizes Algis Budrys' views on SF fandom; Mike Conner on rejection letters; Grant Carrington compares writing, art, and music; James Wilson on Harlan Ellison; book reviews.

**Issue 19 (Winter/Spring 1983).** Interviews with George Yenor and Thomas Disch; "The New Wave Years" by Gardner Dozois; Charles Sheffield on Carl Sagan's upcoming SF novel; George Alec Effinger on the gambles of SF writing; the 1st Annual Thrust Awards; book reviews.



reviews.

**Issue 20 (Spring/Summer 1984).** Interviews with Michael Bishop and Jack Chalker; a self interview by Michael Bishop; Charles D. Hornig on his life in and out of the SF world; Terence Green on academic interest in F&SF; Gregory Feeley on the still unpublished Last Dangerous Visions anthology; Robert Sabella on influential people in the history of SF; 2nd Annual Thrust Awards; book reviews.

**Issue 21 (Fall/Winter 1985).** Interviews with Jack Dann and Larry Niven; Ted White on science fiction versus fantasy; Darrell Schweitzer on F&SF films; 3rd Annual Thrust Awards; Doug Fratz on scientific literacy in SF, awards and other sundry topics; book reviews.

**Issue 22 (Spring/Summer 1985).** Interviews with Al Sarrantonio, Philip Jose Farmer and Alexis Gilliland; Michael Bishop on William Golding; Janrae Frank on Phyllis Ann Karr; Darrell Schweitzer on SF films; book reviews.

**Issue 23 (Fall/Winter 1986).** Interviews with Ben Bova and Sharon Webb; profile on Jane Yolen; Michael Bishop on Philip K. Dick, No Enemy But Time, and other topics; Marvin Kaye on immortality; Darrell Schweitzer on films; Doug Fratz on Theodore Sturgeon; book reviews.

**Issue 24 (Spring/Summer 1986).** Interviews with David Brin and Sterling Lanier; Marvin Kaye on immortality; Darrell Schweitzer on films; Doug Fratz on the Campbell Award; Janrae Frank on Hubbard's dekalogy; book reviews.

**Issue 25 (Fall/Winter 1986).** Interview with Piers Anthony; Michael Bishop on Bradbury, Vonnegut, Sagan and Le Guin; John Shirley on cyberpunk; Charles Platt on hardcovers; Darrell Schweitzer on movies; Marvin Kaye on immortality; book reviews.

**Issue 26 (Spring 1987).** Interview with Stephen R. Donaldson by Nancy Kress and Paul Ferguson; Michael Bishop on the Shirley/Card/Nebula controversy; Charles Sheffield on classifying SF; Charles Platt on the Harlan Ellison/Comics Journal/Michael Fleischer libel suit; David Bischoff on the tragic death of STARDUST magazine; movie reviews by Darrell Schweitzer; book reviews.



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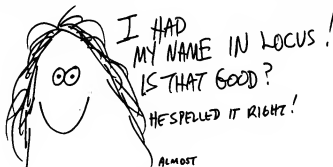
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# Counter-Thrusts



## LETTERS

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Alexis A. Gilliland  
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Charles Sheffield's article in **THRUST** 26 is an interesting special case of the far more general question of style vs. content. We can imagine a sort of liquid chromatograph, in which a mixture is treated, first with polar solvent to produce a line of bands along the X-axis, and then (after turning the dried sample at right angles) with a non-polar solvent to break up those undifferentiated clusters.

The point, of course, is that "literary quality" is not a simple thing, any more than "scientific ideas" is. What sort of scale is to be used, and whose work is to be deemed less competent, and on what grounds? Much mainstream literature is of value because it deals with ideas, often political in nature, which are reflections of the culture in which it was produced. Use the wrong solvent, and you find people up in "critics corner" because the ideas that involved them were moral rather than scientific. Can an idea be both moral and scientific? Obviously yes, artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and the atomic bomb to name only a few.

By the same token, a work that draws the reader in, that involves, excites, arouses, and inspires, may be deemed a piece of trash by the critics. Tarzan lives, as does John Carter of Mars, because they meet the needs of a particular audience. Pre-adolescent males may not be stylistically demanding, but it isn't easy to get them to read, either. A different choice of solvent might put ERB much higher than the 35 Sheffield gives him (and does E.E. Smith really rate only 15?) Go back to 1920, the year *Thuvia, Maid of Mars* was copyrighted, and see what books received critical acclaim. Now see which of them remains in print.

A further criticism of the Sheffield Diagram is that you took the works of a single author, say Paul Anderson, you would find that they were scattered pretty widely. What sort of

statistical procedures will you follow to place him? Will you average the lot, or take only the top three, or maybe only the top one? What if he has a bimodal distribution as a result of writing fantasy from time to time? Sheffield says that if a writer touches more than one field only the sf titles will be considered, but what if some of the SF is marginal?

Right. Asimov's Robot stories, involving those "posttronic brains" are fables, moral speculations on the nature of mind and thought. Do they have as much scientific content as Heinlein's "All You Zombies"? And are we going to count time travel stories as being scientific?

Probably it would be much easier to rate specific works than the output of individual authors. Balmer and Wylie, *When Worlds Collide* would rate very high on the scientific idea scale because it was original. Later treatments of the same idea, however better written they might be would be derivative, and hence scored lower. Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* would rate very highly for scientific originality, and literary excellence as well. In many ways *Canticle* was the definitive postholocaust story, but scientific advances have made it obsolete, since it is no longer credible to imagine a post-holocaust civilization. A 1987 derivative of *Canticle* would be downgraded for both a lack of originality and for scientific ineptitude.

Janrae Frank  
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I really don't know whether I should be writing this or not, since the ferocity of Jessica Salmonson's response of my letter in issue 25 seems very much like a tempest in a teapot. She seems to have missed my point entirely and taken the whole thing rather personally, which it was never intended to be.

What distresses me is Salmonson's remark that "she (meaning me) hasn't read anything of mine and is unqualified to speak either about my writings or my opinions." Jessica was my first editor and a very important person in my life, personally and professionally. I read many of her stories in manuscript before she sold them, including my favorite, "Eagleworm". We corresponded for four years (and, perhaps it is overly

sentimental of me, but I've saved every single letter she ever wrote me). I subscribed to her fanzine *NAGINATA* for many years. And I've read all her novels.

An old sage once said "an idea is not responsible for the people who believe in it." Certainly the life style of Achmed Abdullah and Ann Morrow Lindbergh does not invalidate their philosophies. Further, the quote I selected from Abdullah was spoken between two men on the proper conduct of men, not women. And I really cannot fault philosophies of gentleness for either women or men, after all we live in a violence-riddled world at the edge of potential oblivion. It seems a sad and distressing standard that condemns gentle female characters as "sentimental, gooey-two-shoes." After all, how can we ask men to be gentle if we refuse to be gentle ourselves? And, I, for one, would like to see more gentleness and compassion in both the words of reality and the world of science fiction.

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Jessica Salmonson has always been a singularly humorless person, so it is not surprising that she completely failed to get the joke behind cyberprep. Cyberprep is not a serious attempt at a literary movement. Jessica's apparent misapprehension that it is one is actually much funnier than many of the running cyberprep jokes. It is not an exercise in criticism at all, except perhaps a good-natured ribbing at some of the more pretentious claims made for cyberpunk by Bruce Sterling and John Shirley. After a few Shirley tirades, what sensible response can there be except polite giggles? (And in cyberprep, we're always polite...) But the movement is more an excuse to hold parties at cons, and it is a joke, as everyone except Jessica Salmonson can see, reflecting nothing of the perpetrators of literary opinions, on cyberpunk or anything else. I can't speak for the founders -- primarily Susan Schwartz, Esther Friesner, and Judith Tarr -- but I don't feel any hostility toward writers alleged to be cyberpunks. If we are reacting to anything in that area, it is the marketing-driven, book-cover image of cyberpunk, incorporating a few key elements (mohawks, leather, studs, guns, computer implants), much like sword & sorcery covers in the 1960s. But mostly cyberprep is just good-natured jest, begun at the original Cyberprep Tea at the 1986 Lunacon.

Jessica is entitled to her opinion that everyone who was at the World Fantasy Con cyberprep party is a dullard, but I think few people would agree with her that, say, Jane Yolen is a comically uninteresting writer. Jane was a special guest at the party, and was given an award, the Lizzie (a large, inflatable green alligator) for "niceness in science fiction." In her acceptance speech, she promised to be even nicer, except when presiding over SFWA meetings.

Cyberprep is now over one year old, but for all that the rumblings about "cyberprep braided-megados" no one has tried to write cyberprep fiction. But there is a cyberprep anthem now, sung to the tune of "O Tannenbaum"/"National Embalming School" with choruses to the tunes of "A-Hunting We

Will Go" and "Anvil Chorus"), which gives a feel for the tenor of the whole thing:

Oh, space is vast as vast can be-- There really is a large amount-- Yet as we sail the galaxy, We shall remember: manners count. And as we leave Old Earth behind, Her fields of green, her caps of ice, Still two things we shall bear in mind: Noblesse oblige; we shall be nice. (First Chorus) No wires, no wires, no wires, For we're the Cyberpreps! (repeat) (Other Chorus) Here's to the Golden Rule And to the gold that rules us, 'Gators in Zero-G, The Ivy League that schools us.

Hearing a whole roomful of one's colleagues intone this gem is inspiring. At such moments I wear my original pink and green cyberprep badge proudly.

Now that Michael Bishop has brought the Shirley/Card/Nubula controversy out into the open, we can finally all comment on it. I believe that both Shirley's and Spind's recent attacks on the Nebula Awards can be summed up as, "my works have not been recognized; therefore there is something wrong with the award system." I've grown cynical with age. Membership apathy has always been the Nebula's problem. If everyone would vote instead of complain, campaigning would be useless. Campaigning only works if the voting base is small, and only a few votes decide who's on the ballot. I know that campaigning goes on: I was even invited to join a voting club once, a cabal of vote-swappers who sought to break the perceived monopoly in short fiction awards of a certain clique of authors centered around a certain magazine. But I think that Shirley's attack on Card is misplaced. There are few writers in our field less guilty of campaigning than Card. He has always maintained the utmost sense of fairness, and for the unpaid effort he put into doing the Nebula Award Reports, he deserves only thanks, not hysterical accusations.

I think what's missing in Charles Sheffield's great scheme to classify all SF is the emotional effect and content of the work. The two main appeals of SF are, I believe, ideas and the emotional power of the story. We do not remember "Flowers for Algernon" for its literary quality--elegance of phrasing, skillful structure, etc.--but because it moves us. Sometimes stories that are emotionally powerful have little idea content and aren't very well written either. So where does that leave them on the Sheffield diagram?

[I think Jessica's point was that although cyberprep may be worth a smile or two, it really isn't that funny, not enough to sustain a running joke-movement. (And by the way, when did prep get to be a synonym for polite? When I first tried to envision what "cyberprep" might mean, I pictured an upper-class computer-nerd.) As for the emotional element in fiction, I really don't see that as a separate criterion to scientific and literary quality, but rather something that is integral to both. I think that both the scientific idea content and literary quality can only be assessed according to its emotional effect on the reader. I consider characterization and social milieu part of literary quality, how else can literary quality be judged than by the emotional effect of the characters and their actions on the reader? The physical environment and idea content of SF are also aimed at emotional effects, primarily converging invoking the

"sense of wonder" which characterizes the best hard SF. -DDF]

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I enjoyed the latest THRUST, particularly Michael Bishop's shuttle diplomacy on the SFWA battlefields, about which more than enough has already said. I was also amused to see Darrell Schweitzer up to his old tricks, this time predicting oblivion for Kurt Vonnegut unless he wises up and comes home to mama SF. Too true. What would H.G. Wells, George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Olaf Stapledon etc. etc. have done without Gregg Press and Avon Rediscovery? Would they now be household names like Kornbluth and Shekley?

But Darrell is right on one point. The SF Community can no more forgive Vonnegut's success (and his perceived contempt for the genre) than they could forgive Walter Tevis' indifference. Leaving "SF" off your books in the 1980s is hardly a "cynical marketing strategy". I would think it is more a sign of integrity. The man doesn't think he's writing SF, whether he is or not.

You can disagree on some of the particulars, but Bishop's general thesis on genre and non-genre SF holds up. The Nebula is a clubhouse award. Outsiders can't win it. (It was interesting to see Norman Spinrad, in his recent ASIMOV's work-out on "SF and sci-fi", reaching the belated conclusion that he can't win it either, as long as he writes books, like Child of Fortune, that are insufficiently generic. This is the same Norman Spinrad who played border control cop in putting the boot into Russell Hoban's Riddley Walker. How does it feel, Norm, to be on your own? An incisive if eccentric piece of criticism nonetheless.)

As it happens, Margaret Atwood's A Handmaid's Tale did somehow make the Nebula ballot. It can't win, but it's required reading for anyone interested in the differences between genre SF and real literature. If this book had been written by a real SF writer, it could have been anything from a novelette to a trilogy, but certainly there would have been a lot more plot. The protagonist would have joined the underground early on, made her escape, been re-united with her daughter, participated in the revolution, etc. Atwood obviously hasn't read nearly enough real SF to know how to proceed. But who knows? Maybe one day she'll be an Avon Rediscovery, too.

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One of the two items (never mind the other) that tops my list of author-unintended horrors occurred in one of L. Frank Baum's Oz books. It is revealed as part of the background of the story that a usurper had removed an immortal king by dropping him into a bottomless chasm. He's still falling. It never occurred to Ozma to use her magic wishing belt to rescue the poor fellow, or at least grant him oblivion. That gave me nightmares as a kid, and Marvin Kaye's article in THRUST 25 reminded me of it again. If one



were doomed to irreversible immortality, only the possibility of total loss of consciousness could make all conditions bearable. But I fail to see the attraction of temporary oblivion as a way to make mortality endurable. I too have tried total anesthesia, and it's not a patch on aphrodisiacs.

This issue came to me at a time when I was feeling more than usually broke, burned-out and stressed, and I want to thank Marvin Kaye for reminding me how much I enjoy the struggle. I wish I could share--as an alternative to anesthesia--some of my comparatively delicious happiness. The thing that tugs me off about dying is that it's followed by not knowing what will happen next. Having to leave in the middle of even the rottenest movie can be a drag. Maybe that's what I like best about SF: the illusion of a future as accessible as the past.

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The science-fiction ghetto has started to remind me of a social studies film I saw in high school about life in a little Swiss village. In this isolated village everyone knew each other, everyone was related to a certain extent, and everyone looked alike. For me this was a movie about the dangers of inbreeding, not about social studies.

That's why I appreciated THRUST 25 so much.

I want to congratulate Michael Bishop in his defense of Sagan's Contact and Vonnegut's Galapagos. The SF community isn't just fanish, but clanish, and too much so for its own good. Like that Swiss village, the ghetto is closed to outsiders and to fresh blood as well. I personally disliked Galapagos, and Contact left me flat, but I



know SF when I see it. And thankfully so does Bishop. So what's wrong with the fans?

I was really impressed by John Shirley's article on cyberpunk. It's about time somebody tried something new in the field. In the years of post New Wave, SF has settled down into the pillows of complacency and most of the writing has degenerated into tripe and padded-out trilogies. I'm glad to welcome cyberpunk, because SF is the kind of genre that should never let itself get comfortable.

Kudos to THRUST for providing a forum for these thinkers. The SF ghetto is in desperate need of some urban renewal, and THRUST is the prime bulldozer.

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THRUST is looking good. I was particularly impressed with articles by Michael Bishop and John Shirley in your latest issue [25]. Bishop is right on target here. There is too much of this "us and them" attitude within the science fiction community, and I think this frame of reference is slowly killing the genre.

Why is it that fine writers like Bradbury, Vonnegut and Sagan are ignored come time for the awards presentation at the World Science Fiction Convention? It's because Bradbury and Vonnegut dropped out of the club to pursue bigger and better things. It's because Sagan is already doing bigger and better things. Jealousy is an ugly thing, and there's plenty of it to be found in the science fiction ghetto. But why should science-fiction readers resent the success of writers like Bradbury, Vonnegut and Sagan? Why is it they don't rally behind them instead, and proudly attest to the real power and popularity of science fiction? The irony of this whole phenomenon is that, while they ignore writers like Bradbury and Vonnegut, who did once belong to the club, they rally behind a writer like Stephen King, who was never a club member.

I long ago lost all respect for the Hugo

Award because of this very fannish, very convoluted mode of thinking. Which isn't thinking at all. I know fans think of themselves as an open-minded bunch, but the fact is they are tradition bound and very regimented in their thinking. The Hugo and Nebula awards are popularity awards, and I've long understood that internal politics at SFWA has bearing on the Nebula presentations. As Bishop suggests, SFWA does play an "us and them" game as well. However, it does seem to me that the Hugo has traditionally been awarded to the best idea, while the Nebula has traditionally been awarded to the best style. That is to say, the fan award puts stress on ingenuity, while the writer award, naturally, puts stress on literary merit. I don't believe seriously that they help sell books. I would be interested to know if other readers agree.

I enjoyed John Shirley's article. I believe that cyberpunk holds exciting potential, and it's good to see science fiction do something besides sit in the ghetto! The literature needs revitalization, and cyberpunk may be just what the doctor ordered. Cyberpunk may be the start of a second "New Wave," but because of the New Wave, and our explosive reaction to it during the '60s, I think some people may be reacting to cyberpunk now. I see cyberpunk as a sort of 1980s version of space opera. This new space opera is more about inner space than outer space, and like space opera before it, cyberpunk tends to be done in adventure/thriller mode, containing lots of special effects, but little in the way of reasonable explanation to suspend our disbelief. Cyberpunk is, of course, a reflection of our contemporary sociological predicament. I like Shirley's suggestion that cyberpunk may be an instinctive defense against future shock. And perhaps Shirley is correct in saying that, while far future dystopias are "safe" because they are, after all, so very far away, the scattershot near future we see in cyberpunk is disturbing because it tells the truth, and it's closer to us. It's very possible that cyberpunk, if it is allowed to develop and expand its influence, will become the most "relevant" and "meaningful" literary movement in the history of fantastic fiction. □

## REVIEWS (continued from page 26)



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Reviewed by Andrew M. Andrews

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The novel *Down Town* is lighthearted, zany, uplifting, refreshing, and enjoyable at every turn. □

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